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Christian Maturity

Expository sermon on Ephesians 4: 12-16

J.H. Withers

Two misrepresentations of the Christian life, which are diametrically opposed, have beset the church through the ages, rendering it unacceptable in its mission to the world. There have always been those who consider Christianity as "inside stuff", an esoteric experience reserved for those who, as in the mystery religions, are intellectually introduced and initiated into a superior gnosis, which leads to pride and arrogance. St. Paul was continually troubled in the Corinthian church by those who boasted of their superior wisdom and dismissed his teaching as childish babbling. In 1 Corinthians 4:10 with biting sarcasm he writes, "We are fools for Christ's sake while you are such sensible Christians", and he fairly plays their intellectualism, when he contends that God "has chosen what the world counts folly, for this is wiser than the wisdom of men.....God proposes to save the world by the foolishness of preaching" (1 Cor.1.27 and 21). The teachable heart of a child was needed if men were ever fully to enter into the mystery of God's love.

At the other extreme, however, are the people who make this truth grotesque by emphasizing their childishness and immaturity. They would sigh, "O for the faith of a little child", quoting with pleasure our Lord's saying, "Except you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven". When they fulfilled that condition by despising their intelligence, they wished to perpetuate it by a spiritual Peter Pan life, strenuously refusing to develop into spiritual maturity, confusing childishness with childlikeness.

These verses in Ephesians 4.12-16 represent Paul's appeal to the people to reach up to their full spiritual potential until "speaking the truth in love, they grow up into Christ in all things". The Greek word kataantēsomen ("=attain", viz, "until we all attain to the unity of the faith....to mature manhood"), according to Moulton and Milligan, means "to reach a chosen destination", "striving to attain a goal". They

quote several extracts from the papyri to support this translation. "Reach up to the standard measurement" (sis metron helikias) - this suggests the picture of a little boy having his height marked by his father in progressive stages on the bathroom wall. How quickly he is growing up! Each mark is bringing him nearer to his full mature height by the mystery of growth.

In all this Paul is not depreciating the necessity for childlikeness in the growing Christian. When a man is 'born again', he is a little child, a mere infant in arms so far as the full adventure of the kingdom of God is concerned. But he dare not remain in that condition. Surely one of the major tragedies of life is to move on in other areas of personal living and to allow our Christianity to get pegged down in immaturity and to bring to the control of those other areas a faith and character which have sadly remained undeveloped. While Christian faith begins on the nursery slopes, it must progress to the thrilling slalom of adventurous movement.

In verses 9-12 of Ephesians 4, the apostle has given a list of God's gifts to the church, agencies through which the 'body of Christ' is developed and expanded....prophets, apostles, evangelists, etc. By their leadership the fellowship grows. Then the marks of such growth are succinctly stated. They are service, unity of faith and spiritual learning and understanding.

(a) Service - diakonia. Until the professional took over in the early church, when an order of 'deacon' was established for very practical purposes (see Acts 6), it seems to have been taken for granted that a maturing faith would issue in costly service to the church and the world. The pattern for this would be our Lord's example, who roundly declared that he was "among them as one who serves" (Luke 22.27)

Human pride often displaced this humble calling to serve, as the men with the big names contended for prestige and personal power in the expanding community, authority taking the place of diakonia. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul castigates those who make this their goal, reminding them that their Christ was a servant (a slave?) and the people of God were called to be the servant church. "Who

then is Paul and Apollos but agents?" (1 Cor.3.5 - diakonoi di'hon episteusate)

The nature of Christian diakonia would require a whole volume to explore its challenge for the growing community of the church, but, in essence, it represents the sine qua non of the Christian life, a sensitiveness to recognize human need and a willingness to meet it.

(b) Unity of Faith - henotēs tēs pisteōs

At this stage the Christian church did not possess an extended creed, taking in the many facets of God's revelation through his historical acts. Indeed, for many a day, the early baptismal formula was a simple profession "Jesus is Lord", meaning that the candidate for baptism acknowledged his dependence on the exalted Saviour for life and salvation and his allegiance to his claims. Unity, then, was to be attained as Christians grew up into Christ, the focus of unity, finding an harmonious meeting place in his continual presence in fellowship and sacrament. The sign that a Christian was growing up was seen when he realised his membership in the sacred Body, subordinating his unredeemed self-assertion to a humble allegiance, shared with the others.

(c) Spiritual learning (or understanding) - tēs epignōseos tou huiou tou Theou

In Biblical Greek epiginōskō means to "learn" rather than to "possess a body of understanding". Service, yes. Unity of faith, yes. But growing up also implies the humility to be teachable, to submit to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who, as the Gospel asserts, "will lead you into all truth." A growth in experience is a sure sign that the Christian is growing up into Christ, reaching upwards to a standard in Him who is the way, the truth and the life. Paul insists that this is not an attainment as though he had reached finality in thought and behaviour, but a reaching upwards --- "forgetting those things which are behind, I stretch towards the mark...".

I find verses 14-16 quite fascinating, as they depict the several facets of childhood, which must be outgrown if one is to grow up into Christ in all things. Oliver Wendell

Holmes captured this thought in his "The Chambered Nautilus":

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
 As the swift seasons roll!
 Leave thy low-vaulted past!
 Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
 Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
 Till thou at length art free,
 Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea.

The Christian must leave the outgrown shell of his childhood stage.

Notice, in passing, the apostle's unwonted tact, as he drives home this point to his readers by including himself in the general exhortation, "that we be no more children". Well Of course, what he really means is, "Come on now; stop being kiddies: be your age!" So often the Christian faith does not grow to fit an expanding world of experience and need. So often Christian character which is the expression of Christian faith, never seems to emerge from the nursery into full manhood. The Greek word 'teleios', which the AV translates as 'perfect', normally just means 'mature', and in this passage dealing with childhood and growth, it obviously has this connotation.

In four short phrases, then, Paul hints at the forms of spiritual childishness which, it would seem, were still exhibited by these Ephesian Christians, painting through a delicious choice of words a series of pictures which are sadly only too familiar in our own age. Each is a little window opening on a special view of the nature of childhood; each challenges the Christian to grow up. Let us study them.

(1) The first characteristic of Paul's typical child is his fluctuating enthusiasms. The Greek word 'kludōnizomenoi' literally mean "tossing up and down like the waves of the sea" (kludon= a wave) and suggests the surface of the undulating sea, whose waves rise and fall with sea-sickening monotony. So, hints the apostle, it is time we stopped being children, bobbing up and down with vacillating enthusiasm.

That is an exact description of childhood, isn't it?

You bring home a new toy, a nicely painted engine for your little son, and a pretty doll for your daughter, and set them carefully in their cots. Their roars of excitement bring the neighbours to their windows and the tears of joy to your own eyes. Tomorrow when you go to see the children, the toys have been discarded, tossed impatiently from their prams with the basest contempt. Enthusiasm today is the prelude to tomorrow's utter indifference - bobbing up and down like the waves. "Let us stop playing babies", cries Paul, and the word nepioi literally means 'babies'. How many of us do not feel convicted by this thought? "Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down. Ah! Yes, Lord", sings the negro spiritual. It describes our common condition for we all experience the hilltops of excitement and enthusiasm for Christ, only to drop down into the troughs of despair with tomorrow's light. "Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord?"

Now, of course, temperament is deeply enmeshed in this fluctuation of spirit. There are choleric people whose moods alternate, one day passionate and the next dull and listless. But we dare not blame everything on our temperament. The church is full of such waverers: they burst into song when a new minister is appointed, making all kinds of promises and endeavours, to which they cling - so long as he is new! When the novelty wears off, they become critical and negligent. Or a new organisation is started in a congregation with the blowing of trumpets: there is terrific enthusiasm and bags of good works until the spirit flags, and the leader's heart is broken by this strange apathy. Bobbing up and down like the waves of the sea!

Maturity of faith is the foundation of that perseverance of the saints which has strengthened the church in every age that quality of fiery endeavour which scorns the shifts of mood. "That we be no more nepioi, children of fluctuating enthusiasms, but rather grown men and women filled with the Holy Spirit."

(ii) Paul's second charge against immaturity is that it veers with the changing winds of popular fashion. How does he put it? "Carried around by every changing wind of teaching." Again we have a picture of typical childhood. It is either a weather-vane which alters its direction in accordance with the altering directions of the veering wind,

or else a small sailing vessel opening its sails to catch the prevailing wind, no matter from what art and without a goal in view.

This description fits perfectly the behaviour of many children we know for no group of people are more sensitive to the vagaries of changing fashion than a group of children. No child ever wants to be out of line. They come home from school mouthing the catch-words of the moment. These are replaced during the next term by even more terrifying phrases! When the Head Girl adopts a new hair fashion, soon all the lassies down to Form 1 have copied it. All heads must be dressed alike! It will soon change when the paragon loses her popular appeal.

So Paul is appealing to us to drop the habits of Form 1 and to graduate to a higher class of being. The sailor with whom he wishes to sail is one who has a goal in view and who is not afraid of tacking into the wind. No one can win a yacht race simply by following the prevailing wind. Was Paul thinking of his experience with the Athenians who seemed to follow all the popular intellectual crazes and were ready to adopt any new doctrine which invaded the city? The Vicar of Bray is more than an historical character.

The mature Christian must certainly take note of the changes in the intellectual and spiritual atmosphere of his time. He is no diehard, wedded to an unchangeable past. But he has a star to sail by and a port in view. So often the will of Christ will involve a deliberate stand against the blowing of popular ideas and opinions. Often it means a willingness to endure criticism in the interest of conviction. Veering with the veering winds of public favour is for the nursery. Christians know how to tack!

(iii) Again, Paul accuses the childish Christians of Ephesus of a tragic vagueness of character. How does he put it? En kubia tōn anthrōpōn - the Greek phrase which I translate "in the nature of a human dice" (RSV= "by the cunning of men"). The particle 'en' is often used in Biblical Greek as "in the state of", "in the condition of". Kubia, of course, is the ordinary word for 'dice'. This is a highly suggestive phrase when applied to childishness. For many a day I have played "Ludo" with a grandchild and watched with horror the vagaries of the dice, knowing that

I cannot move my piece until I throw a "six". You never know how the dice will fall and this can cause considerable exasperation. You do not know and neither do I. The dice is unpredictable. And there we are, back in childhood once more. The child's response to life is as vague as a falling dice because its little mind and character have not yet been fully formed. So when I drive my car in a street where children are playing, I take the utmost care for I shall never know how a child will jump, perhaps right into the line of the car. You have found the same behaviour when you take a child to buy a new dress. Normally she prefers blue but today nothing will divert her from a sickly yellow! Vague and unpredictable are the children.

But the mark of a mature Christian is that there is something clearly defined about his character, so that you can count on his response on any given occasion and almost know beforehand in what way he will react. But why so? Because the mature Christian is a man of deep convictions to which he will cling through fair weather and foul. There is nothing of the dice about him: he always shows the same face to the world and people put their trust in him because they know they can count on his loyalty. Unpredictable people are people without firmly-held convictions.

(iv) Finally, Paul suggests that the childish Christian is often the victim of plausibility. His phrase is exceedingly difficult to translate - en panourgia pros tēn methodian tēs planēs (RSV= "by their craftiness in deceitful wiles"). It suggests the trickery of the charlatan, so I translate it, "Gulled by the plausibility of error". Personally I think it is a picture of a conjuror who can work all kinds of illusions by his sleight of hand, bringing rabbits out of hats and producing endless handkerchiefs out of his sleeve. You have seen him at work, the swiftness of his hand deceiving the eye! He directs your attention to some quite innocent action, while his hands are secretly manipulating his bag of tricks. You are easily taken in. What kind of a children's party would be complete without the conjuror? Children love his deceptions and some of us are still children - gullible!

The Acts of the Apostles has several examples of charlatans who worked on the gullibility of human nature and we know how Paul castigated them. Hitler used the same expert-

ise; by making enough claims and telling large enough lies, he succeeded in winning over a nation of some eighty millions, persuading them that he was God incarnate. He translated into political action the oft-quoted dictum of Al Capone, "It's a sweet racket, so long as you keep the folks kidded." The immature Christian is always at the mercy of evil's plausible approach for, as Paul told his friends at Corinth, "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." He puts pleasant names on evil dispositions, dressing them up to look attractive, and offering them freely from his prodigal hand. And the childish Christian falls under his spell.

So, writes Paul, we must grow up into Christ in all things.

Holy Scripture and Holy Spirit in the theology of
Karl Barth

John Thompson

1. Revelation and Scripture

Traditional Protestant dogmatics generally began its writing either with arguments about natural and revealed religion or with the doctrine of Holy Scripture. This was in line with the Reformation emphasis on the sole authority of the Scriptures as the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Karl Barth diverges from this in two ways:

(a) He begins his Dogmatics with the Trinity and points out that he is following one of the few in the past who took the same route, namely Peter Lombard in the Middle Ages. He does so because he feels that anterior to our understanding of Holy Scripture and its nature must be our knowledge of God in his revelation. To be sure this revelation comes to us in and through Holy Scripture but it is not Scripture itself that is our authority but God speaking in and through it. Barth, therefore, can summarize his position by saying that while the Bible gives us the answer about revelation in this way "it has attested to us the Lordship of the triune God in the incarnate word by the Holy Spirit." /1/ He adds immediately "but in so doing it has answered the question concerning itself which we have not yet asked." /2/

(b) Barth indicates his desire to remain true to Reformation insights about Holy Scripture, but departs at important points from their tendency towards a too literalist approach. For it is only in the light of revelation that we can understand what Scripture is, though on the other hand revelation comes to us through Scripture. The two, of course, belong together. Hence, in his Dogmatics, his treatment of Scripture comes chiefly within and in fact towards the end of his treatment of revelation. J.K.S. Reid exaggerates slightly but his view of Barth's position is basically correct when he writes, "this represents a notable departure from the tendency especially evident in Calvinism to set the doctrine of Holy Scripture prominently in the forefront. Barth's presentation makes it clear from the start that a clean break has been made with the tendency in Protestant orthodoxy to identify revelation with Holy Scripture." /3/

It is therefore obvious that for Barth Scripture does not

stand alone however much one emphasizes the Reformation sola scriptura, by Scripture alone. It is related to the life of the church, first through preaching based on it, and secondly as pointing us to the meaning and significance of it, namely, the place where God speaks his word to man. Barth can, in his early writings, speak of three forms of the Word of God - preached, written and revealed. The order does not indicate an order of importance but more of experience, though of course it must be said that the last is the primary form of the Word of God. Following Luther (and perhaps reflecting his own pastoral experience in preaching) proclamation comes first. This is grounded in and expounds Scripture, and this again has its meaning and basis in God's act of revelation in Israel and in Jesus Christ. By this way of speaking Barth means to say to us: here are three interrelated and interdependent ways by which the triune God revealed in the incarnate Lord, speaks to us by the Holy Spirit.

In his later writings, Barth drops this way of speaking and uses the term "Word of God" primarily, indeed, exclusively, for God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. The Holy Scriptures and preaching both bear witness to this, each in its own different way, the Holy Scriptures by being the permanent and inspired record of revelation and preaching being based again on this. Barth's interpreters dispute at this particular point whether this is a correction or a modification of his basic position and earlier emphases. The latter would seem to be more correct and can be expressed in this way: "Barth's answer is clear. There is only one Word of God and definitive testimony is given to it by the Apostles and prophets in the Old and New Testaments. Since, therefore, Jesus Christ declares himself through this testimony in a way that has binding authority for his community, preaching is bound to this and must, by the Holy Spirit, express it. One can therefore speak either of three forms of the one Word or of the one Word attested in Bible and church. The Bible and church stand together, the latter building on the former and both coinciding and agreeing in an intimate way with the Word spoken in Jesus Christ. The former is, however, the definitive witness by which the church exists." /4/

So since Barth increasingly uses the word 'witness' as he

continues his writings in the Church Dogmatics, we can say that the Scriptures are the primary authority, the witness to revelation; the Church's proclamation becomes this in a derivative sense from the Holy Scriptures by the Holy Spirit. Perhaps the danger of the former way of speaking was that it could be misunderstood in the sense of a too immediate, almost direct identity between revelation, scripture and preaching. For Barth the reality and possibility of such revelation rests only in God as he speaks and uses these means by the Holy Spirit. Walter Kroek, /5/ a Reformed theologian, strongly influenced by Barth, states that shortly before his death Barth spoke to a small group and indicated that he would no longer speak of the three forms of the Word of God. He used for preaching the illustration of the server at the Mass, who rings the bell which indicates the change that takes place when God comes and speaks his Word through Scripture and proclamation but it is not the preacher who actually performs and brings the Word of God. He is the medium of revelation.

2. The Nature of Scripture

We have already indicated that Scripture is not the thing signified but points to it and by the Word and Spirit conveys it. This is sacramental language and Barth sees the relationship between revelation and Scripture in this instrumental or sacramental light. Scripture is thus to be defined as the primary, definitive, authoritative witness to divine revelation. At this point it is necessary to say what Barth means by witness for it is not simply a human word with merely human authority. It is indeed a human word, that of the prophets and apostles of the OT and NT, but it is a word which stands in a unique relationship to the object of testimony. G.W. Bromley /6/ explains the particular and very specialized way in which Barth uses this word when he writes, "the word 'witness' is a dangerous one if used in its ordinary sense but if we think of the Bible as a witness in the way in which the Bible itself describes the prophets and apostles as witnesses - "he who receives you, receives me", it is perhaps not quite so objectionable as some critics of Barth suppose." Indeed it scarcely can be called objectionable at all, and is now widely accepted by modern scholars as the best way to describe the Holy Scriptures.

The Scriptures are to be distinguished from revelation as a human word but at the same time to be regarded as identical with it as revelation is its basis and object. There is this twofoldedness about it and there is, therefore, an indirect identity between Bible and revelation or the Word of God. Barth's favourite way of putting this is to say that the Scriptures become and so are the Word of God as God by his Spirit takes and uses them to speak ever and again to men. And since Jesus Christ is the content of revelation, he is the key, centre and meaning of the Scriptures. They bear witness to him. Let us look, therefore, at these two points briefly in turn to see their significance, (a) the event character of the Scriptures and (b) their relationship to Jesus Christ.

(a) The Scriptures as an event

The Scriptures become and so are the Word of God. We can therefore say the Bible is the Word of God but only in this sense. As a testimony they indicate, point to, are a sign as a special type of testimony and God takes and uses these in a special way to come and speak. Their authority is not simply in their words but in and through the human words. They are not per se revelation but instrumental thereto.

The point that Barth makes here, as he does again and again, is that our hearing and receiving the Word of God does not come by our own doing, not even our reading of the Scriptures, but is the miracle and mystery of God's grace, of his sovereignty and at his disposing. We cannot control revelation. He does. Now this does not mean that we do not use the Scriptures but simply sit back and wait. Quite the opposite. In fact, since Barth urges a listening to, a wrestling with the Scriptures to hear what God the Lord will say to us, we must use them diligently again and again. For here he who spoke in the past, promises to speak in the present and we await his speaking now. Scripture has, therefore, a unique superiority for us and the church as the place of God's promise, his presence in act, his speaking to us, the happening of his Word.

Barth writes /7/ , "it is round this event that the whole doctrine of Holy Scripture circles and with it all Church dogmatics and with it, too, preaching, sacraments.

and proclamation." J.K.S. Reid (8) interprets Barth thus, "round this matter of event, the whole problem of Holy Scripture turns as does that of dogmatics, preaching, sacraments, proclamation. In the reality and truth of this event, there is nothing already past or only future, nothing that is pure recollection or pure expectation in this event. This original witness is the Word of God." What this means is that, as we have experienced through the testimony of the Scriptures God's revelation in the past and expect it in the future, so these two, as it were, come together in God's act and speaking, and we hear it as the Word of God now. Barth is saying clearly here that only God can speak his Word and he does it ever and again through the Holy Scripture.

(b) The Relation of the Scripture to Jesus Christ.

Since Jesus Christ is for Barth the centre of faith and knowledge, and since the Scriptures testify to him, who he is will determine what Scripture is. Just as he is God and man in one, so the Scriptures have a divine-human aspect. The error of the older theology was to make the words too literally the Word of God, though they did not forget or omit the work of God's Spirit in illumining the holy pages. Yet the parallel, as Barth readily acknowledges, /9/ is only an imperfect one, for the words become the Word ever and again, whereas the union of God and man is permanent in Jesus Christ.

There are two points of difference: (i) there is no unity of person between God and the humanity of prophets and apostles; (ii) the humanity of prophets and apostles is not taken up into the glory of God as is the case with that of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, Barth can say of the Bible /10/ , "it too can and must, not as though it were Jesus Christ, but in the same serious sense as Jesus Christ, be called the Word of God: the Word of God in the sign of the word of man, if we are to put it accurately."

3. The Inspiration of Holy Scripture /11/

In what has been said to date, a particular view of God's relationship to and use of the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit is implied. Barth does not deny but affirms divine inspiration and seeks to give it a broader basis and interpretation than previously. He argues that this was in fact the

intention of the Reformers even if it was not always actually carried out nor indeed could be fully carried out at the time of the Reformation. He agrees that the primary author of Scripture is God the Holy Spirit, whereas the writers are secondary authors, secundarii auctores, yet real human authors. How then are the two related? Barth sees Scripture, Holy Spirit and human response and receiving the Word, as three aspects of the one work of God by the Holy Spirit and it is this, in its totality, that is theopneustia (divine inspiration) .

Barth believes that there are three stages in the total process of revelation: (a) the fact of the revelation of God in Israel and in Jesus Christ, the hidden wisdom of God there manifest; (b) there is the authoritative interpretation and speaking of it by the Holy Spirit. We have the mind of Christ, the thought of Christ on God's revelation as it is stated in 1 Corinthians 2. This eventually was crystallized through both oral and written tradition and became Holy Scripture; (c) the act of the same Spirit, taking the written word and enabling us to understand. Barth himself describes it, /12/ "with all other men the witness stands before the mystery of God and the benefit of his revelation. That this mystery is disclosed to him is the first thing and that he can speak of it the second....But the mystery of God will still remain a mystery...if the same Spirit who has created the witness, does not bear witness of its truth to men, to those who read and hear." And here we have Barth's strong emphasis when he writes, "This self-disclosure in its totality is theopneustia, the inspiration of the word of the prophets and apostles." /13/

The weakness of much traditional teaching (both Catholic and Protestant) , is that it took one aspect, the second, namely, the inspiration of the words and made it primary and almost exclusive. The tendency was to make the truths of Scripture a truth we can easily grasp and not a miracle of free grace. Indeed the main criticism of Barth from both sides is that the human element, as the divine word from God, is undervalued at the expense of an exclusive emphasis on the act of grace - the event character of his speaking to us in Holy Scripture. For Barth, however, to put an additional reason in place of the reason God has given, questions and endangers God's own way of acting. Barth agrees with Luther

more than Calvin in this respect and states /14/ , "as Luther insisted in innumerable passages the word of Scripture given by the Spirit can be recognized as God's word only because of the work of the Spirit which has taken place in it, takes place again and goes a step further, i.e., becomes an event for its hearers or readers. How else will God be recognized except by God Himself?" This well expresses and underlines the characteristic emphasis of Barth throughout the whole of his theology. "Only by God is God known."

This does not mean any minimizing of the importance of the actual words. Barth accepts verbal inspiration but rejects what he calls verbal inspiredness. In other words there is no inherent efficacy in the words themselves. He believes that it was precisely this mistake that post-Reformation Protestantism committed. It destroyed the mystery and the Bible became a part of the natural knowledge of God. It sought a certainty that was tangible, of works and not of faith. The human, rather than being exalted in this whole process, is really minimized and scarcely visible. For God speaks and gives by his Spirit (according to this view) even matters that we would know by ordinary means and this was certainly not the intention of Holy Scripture. The end result was that no discrepancies or errors at all could be admitted, and the Bible became a "paper Pope", as Barth says /15/ , and "unlike the living Pope in Rome, it was wholly given up into the hands of its interpreters. It was no longer a free and spiritual force but an instrument of human power." As a counterblast to this kind of literalism, perhaps as hyperbole, or to show the untenable nature of this position (which one would regard today as fundamentalism), Barth posits the thesis that, even if the witnesses were at fault in every word, the true word of grace would and could be spoken in their human erring and fallible words. /16/ This is not a position that one can really defend, since the witnesses must surely be reliable in their interpretation, else their testimony is not valid. The best reason one can think of for this line of argument is that Barth is arguing ad hominem. In other words he is saying, if you take the words of the Bible to be wholly infallible, this does not prove the truth of revelation - it is God speaking through it that does - any more than the view that they are wholly

fallible and errant, does. It is God who uses this testimony, and He alone who speaks His Word. Nevertheless, because of the very nature of the relationship of the witnesses to the original revelation, one must say that it is a trustworthy and reliable witness and to speak in this way is an excess, if not erroneous.

What Barth is always concerned to counter, is not a merely historical reading of Scripture which, while necessary and proper in its place, and while using all the means of literary, historical and other forms of criticism, is but a preliminary to a real theological exegesis, to a listening to and saying after him what God the Lord is saying to us.

Further, if we ask why this book alone, why a canon - Barth answers /17/ that it was not brought about by us but was simply recognized by the church. The church is not the author of the canon. The central fact that made the church accept these, and not other books, was the fact that they so impressed themselves upon the mind of the church by the Holy Spirit as divinely inspired, that it was felt one could not do otherwise than acknowledge their authority. To that extent they are self-authenticating.

4. Scripture and Tradition

Barth is aware of the fact that there is a question of importance here, and that it is not simply enough to state sola scriptura or speak of the divine authority of Scripture without indicating how he sees the relationship between scripture and tradition. The Scriptures are the supreme authority, or rather God speaking through them, Dei loquentis persona, as Calvin said. Hence one cannot set up beside them or over them any equal or higher authority. Neither the church in its life and tradition, nor human reason must equal or be judge of the Word of God. God Himself is his own witness and interpreter of it, and our attitude must be one of obedience. The church in its life and tradition is always challenged anew by this higher court, this authority, and yet strengthened at the same time by the promise of Christ's presence in and with the biblical testimony. So the church and its tradition "does not claim a direct, absolute and material authority either for some third court of appeal or for herself." /18/ Barth follows this by saying /19/ , "but for Holy Scripture as the Word of

God." But the church under it as obedient to the Word, does have a relative authority in its life, witness and tradition.

The phrase which sums up Barth's own attitude towards tradition in the church is this: "respectful freedom in relation to tradition." The respect comes first in relation to decisions and people in the church. There are three areas where this respect should be manifest: /20/ (a) in the decision about the Canon in which the church points beyond itself to the Word; (b) in respect of the Fathers of the church, particularly the Patristic witness and the Reformers. There can be no question of going back on, but rather, completing the Reformation. This respect arises because of the relative authority of these Fathers and their work, for they stated as clearly and as biblically as possible, the essence of the apostolic faith. There is respect too for the Communion of Saints as a living reality today, and these are not simply dead voices but living ones in the church of Jesus Christ, giving a testimony to which we must faithfully listen, and give heed as interpreters of the Word. (c) This tradition of our forefathers has been enshrined in creeds and confessions in which was set forth what they believed the Scriptures taught. They were to be a testimony for truth and against error, and to serve as a bond of union between members of the church. They sought to expound the Scriptures and be a testimony to their authority.

Yet this respect for tradition and traditional statements is, and must be, combined with a freedom of the Word and under the Word, a freedom to look at past statements and formulate them anew. It may be that we will come to exactly the same conclusions as did our forefathers at Chalcedon, for example, in their christological statement. But the very nature of Confession in the Reformed tradition makes the possibility of revision ever open. Barth writes /21/, "if divine infallibility cannot be ascribed to any church's Confession, then in practice we have to recognize that every church Confession can be regarded as only a stage on the road which can as such be relativized, and succeeded by a further stage in the form of an altered Confession. Therefore, respect for its authority has necessarily to be conjoined with a basic readiness to envisage a possible alteration of this kind."

So the ultimate authority is the Word of God, spoken again and again in and to the church on the basis of the biblical testimony. This in turn creates a tradition of faith, fellowship and confession, all of which have a relative authority as they seek faithfully to reflect the true light of the Word.

Notes

1. Church Dogmatics (CD), 1/2, p457
2. ibid.
3. J.K.S. Reid, The Authority of Scripture, London 1957, p195.
4. J. Thompson, Christ in Perspective, Edinburgh 1978, pp116-117.
5. Walter Kreck, in Berthold Klappert, Promissio und Bund, Gesetz und Evangelium bei Luther und Barth, Göttingen 1976, pp272-3.
6. G.W. Bromiley, Karl Barth's Doctrine of Inspiration, quoted by Colin Brown in Karl Barth and the Christian Message, London 1967, p32.
7. CD, 1/2, p503.
8. Reid, op.cit., p214.
9. CD, 1/2, p513.
10. ibid, p500.
11. ibid, pp514ff.
12. ibid, p516.
13. ibid.
14. ibid, p521.
15. ibid.
16. ibid, pp529-30.
17. ibid, pp473ff
18. ibid, p541 (*Italics mine - JT.*)
19. ibid, p538.
20. ibid, pp597ff
21. ibid, p659.

The Relationship of Circumcision to Baptism
with particular reference to Colossians 2. 11-13

R.E.H. Uprichard

In Colossians 2.11-13 we have perhaps the most prominent reference to circumcision alongside baptism in the NT. It seems generally agreed even by prominent Baptists that there is an analogous relationship between circumcision and baptism here.

The difficulty lies in defining the nature of that relationship. It has been variously expressed. Some suggest it is to be seen in terms of an antithesis, others parallelism, even equivalence. Fulfilment has also been advocated as the primary thrust of the relationship, while contrast between the inner and outer aspects of both signs has been taken as normative. Paedobaptists incline to accept a relationship of equivalence between circumcision and baptism in Col.2.11-13 as signs of the covenant of grace. This means that what is attributed in terms of significance to circumcision in the OT is attributable to baptism in the NT. Indeed they go further and suggest that implicit in Col.2. 11-13 and in other NT evidence is the fact that baptism actually replaces circumcision as a sign of salvation. The following considerations might be seen as supporting this view particularly in respect of Col.2.11-13:

1. Juxtaposition

The evident juxtaposition of circumcision and baptism in Col.2.11-13 creates a parallelism in thought which is highly significant. That Paul in one breath, as it were, can describe Christians as "circumcised with a circumcision made without hands" and, in the next, as "buried with him in baptism" suggests a strongly analogous relationship almost tantamount to equivalence in terms of what is signified by these terms. This is substantiated by the continued use of the aorist passive verbal forms in this passage. While the parallelism in form may be somewhat disrupted in the change from the "in him" of v11 to the "with him" implicit in the verb in v12, taking the subsequent en hō as referring to baptism immediately preceding and not to Christ, yet the parallelism in sense is quite obvious. It would have been most

unusual for Paul to use these expressions in this way had not a relationship of equivalence between the two already existed in his mind.

2. Unity of thought

There is a strong unity of thought in these verses where both images of circumcision and baptism are used to express one and the same relationship of the believer to Christ. This is demonstrable in a number of particular emphases:

(a) In its intensive nature. The basic theme is that of the believer's enjoyment of the fulness which Christ shares with God. The believer shares in this fulness under the metaphor of circumcision in that he receives in Christ a circumcision which, unlike the physical rite removing only part of the fallen fleshly nature, strips right off the whole body of the old nature. This takes place "in the circumcision of Christ", a phrase which it seems better to take as referring to Christ's death rather than to his actual circumcision, itself a token anticipation of the death. Similarly this fulness of completeness is also received under the symbolism of baptism which connotes the believer's sharing in the death and resurrection of Christ. The addition of the prefix sun (= together) to the verbs simply emphasizes the believers' unity with Christ in these events. It is clear that both these signs refer to the believer's enjoyment of Christ's fulness which is theirs as by faith they share in the benefits of his death and resurrection. Both circumcision and baptism are used as metaphors to illustrate the intensive effects of the faith-union of the believer in Christ.

(b) In the inextricable manner in which the two signs are implied particularly in v13. The unity of thought seems to be driven home especially in the way in which the results of the believer's relationship to Christ are described: "and you who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses." The effects of that salvation of which both baptism and circumcision are signs is here stated in a unified manner such as would suggest a relationship of equivalence of the two signs in the writer's mind.

(c) In the spiritual emphasis underlying the union. It is quite clear that Paul is speaking in these verses of the believer's salvation. In this context the reference to "a circumcision made without hands" is significant. There seems here an obvious contrast in his mind between physical and spiritual circumcision - a contrast evident elsewhere in his writings. It is not at all clear that there was any contrasting thought in his mind between water-baptism and baptism of the Spirit. But the key-thought here is primarily inner and spiritual rather than outer and symbolic. If however there is evident unity of thought vis-a-vis the inner spiritual reality of which Paul is speaking and he uses language of an outer symbolic nature, it is not unreasonable to assume an equivalence of meaning in the outer symbol. Otherwise his use of these terms is inexplicable.

3. Contextual background

There are two ways in which this seems relevant to our discussion:

(a) Paul in the general context seems to be combatting the Colossian heresy. It is difficult to assess whether it was of a Jewish or Greek nature or syncretistic. Certainly it seemed to contain elements of Jewish legalism, e.g., human tradition (2.8), festival, new moon or sabbath (2.16). Could it be then that among these circumcision was being stressed? The context does not make this clear but if it was, then Paul is dealing here a crushing blow to its observance in stressing the physical rite as superseded by the fulness or substance of Christ's circumcision and its application to the believer.

(b) Circumcision is a prominent theme in Ch.2 of Colossians. The use of apekduomai is significant. The double prefix apo and ek emphasizes the completeness of the action - a total stripping off. It is only used here in Paul (Col.2.15; 3.9; cf. noun apekdusis, 2.11). The use in 3.9 is certainly interesting for here it is used in a context of language sometimes ascribed to baptismal metaphor, i.e., "put on" or "put off", again suggesting the link with baptism.

If then in the context Paul is attacking a legalistic

attitude to physical circumcision and perhaps contrasting it with a "spiritual circumcision" of which Christian baptism is the same in essence, a degree of equivalence in circumcision and baptism underlies the thought.

4. Kerygmatic background

The close kerygmatic background of the death and resurrection of Christ in Col.2.11-13 and Romans 6.3f is evident as well as a strong similarity of thought in these passages. A major difference is that circumcision is present in the Colossian passage but not in Romans. The reason for this may be related to the purpose in writing. In Romans Paul is countering antinomianism where the baptismal reference sufficed to make the point. In Colossians if he were attacking Jewish legalism, the reference to circumcision would be most relevant. The point is not the absence of circumcision from Romans 6 but the reference to it in Colossians 2 in a kerygmatic context, making precisely the same point as is made in the reference to baptism. Both circumcision and baptism are related to basic Gospel facts.

5. Oath Background

In his book, "By Oath Consigned", Meredith G. Kline stresses this particular aspect. Examining circumcision and baptism in the light of practices followed by ancient Near Eastern kings and vassals in treaty-making, curse or malediction as well as blessing is seen to be involved in the oath-signs of circumcision and baptism. Both these aspects are said to be evident in both OT and NT and are especially obvious in Col.2.11-13, "As a death in union with Christ, the representative sin-bearer, in his crucifixion, the Christian's circumcision-death is an undergoing of the wrath of God against sin, a falling under his sword of judgment. It is a judicial death as the penalty for sin." According to Kline this judicial-ordeal aspect of Christ's death continues as Paul deals with baptism: the curse claim of the law satisfied on the Cross (v14), decision rendered through combat (v15) and the accusing role of Satan (v15) are all said to be further judicial features of Christ's death. He concludes: "Graphical

confirmation of the ordeal significance of baptism is thus found in the Pauline integration of baptism with the Messianic death-burial-resurrection schema, especially where Paul expounds the latter as both a circumcision and a judicial ordeal by combat."

While a degree of reticence may remain for accepting Kline's thesis completely, yet this highly suggestive analysis does tend to substantiate further a very close relationship in the significance of circumcision and baptism.

6. Implied repeal of circumcision

While a certain analogy may be seen between circumcision and baptism in Col.2.11-13, even to a degree of equivalence, does this passage necessarily imply a repeal of circumcision and its replacement by baptism? A number of considerations might tend in that direction:

(a) The fulness, completeness and substance as opposed to shadow by which Christ's person is described and the fact that the believer shares that fulness in his faith-union with Christ in his circumcision-crucifixion, would all incline to suggest that circumcision had been superseded. It is no longer necessary for the believer is complete in Christ and in his circumcision. The way in which the passage emphasizes the total effect of Christ's circumcision as opposed to physical circumcision, i.e., "putting off (apekduomai) the body of (the sins of) the flesh", underlines this feature.

(b) The non-material, spiritual and superior aspect of this "circumcision without hands" incident in the passage also predicates the cessation of the physical rite.

(c) If the context implies that physical circumcision was one of human traditions which were being imposed on the Colossian believers, then Paul seems here to be urging its cessation by showing its superfluity.

(d) The lack of distinction between water-baptism and baptism by the Spirit as compared with the evident contrast in thought between physical and spiritual circumcision seems here to be significant. That Paul does not categorize a "baptism without hands" as he does circumcision, seems to point up the fact that Christian baptism takes up the spiritual side of circumcision within the OT and is there-

fore both meaningful and admissible under the NT. There is, it seems, this element of fulfilment in the imagery of Col.2.11-13 and it is because of this that baptism can be seen to replace circumcision here.

It is difficult to understand Kingdon's dilemma when he claims that regeneration, not baptism, is the antitype of which circumcision is the type. There is a sense in which both circumcision and baptism are the types of which regeneration is the antitype. Both circumcision and baptism are related to regeneration. The reference to baptism per se in Col.2.12f implies its proper continuance in the light of circumcision's cessation. The replacement however of circumcision by baptism as a sign of the covenant of grace has been urged on other supplementary grounds also.

7. Other considerations

There are additional grounds on which the analogy of circumcision and baptism in equivalence might be advocated, viz. : that they have a similar meaning if by contrasting imagery of grace and salvation; there appears to be a link between baptism and the Abrahamic covenant in Galatians 3.27,29; other Pauline passages exist where the signs of circumcision, Passover, baptism and the Lord's Supper are used indiscriminately of the church in both OT and NT, e.g., 1 Cor.10.1f; 5.7; Rom.15.8; both circumcision and baptism are said to be referred to as a "seal", e.g., Rom.4.11;cf 2 Cor.1.22; Eph.1.13; 4.30 (Cullmann, Jeremias), though the link is somewhat inferential and thus, in my opinion, weak; both circumcised and baptized are described as "holy" (Cullmann quoting Strack-Billerbeck), though such evidence is here extra-biblical. /1/

However in respect of the actual replacement of circumcision by baptism the following considerations have been urged.

(a) Paul's attitude to circumcision. It is maintained that Paul generally advocated the cessation of circumcision. With regard to the Gentiles Gal.5.2 is cited, "Now I Paul say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be no advantage to you." But such cessation is rather implicit than explicit here and Acts 21.21, quoted in reference to Jewish Christians, is much clearer, "And they have

been told about you that you teach all the Jews among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcize their children or observe the customs." Beasley-Murray /2 notes that this action of Paul was a subject of amazement to James and the elders and thus claims that it was hardly a general practice. He maintains that both circumcision and baptism were practised side by side. He further suggests the unlikelihood of Christians administering baptism on circumcision principles since the one initiated into a national status, the other to the spiritual community. The partial or widespread cessation however hardly affects the general principle of reasoning here. If this was Paul's policy whether generally acceptable or not, the replacement of circumcision by baptism implicit in Col.2.11-13 might well be substantiated. Further the spiritual significance of circumcision evident in both OT and NT would preclude Christian leaders from divorcing circumcision from baptism in their considerations for the administration of baptism.

(b) Cullmann, advocating baptism as a fulfilment of circumcision and thus not a repeal of circumcision nor a supplement, claimed that this was explicit in Rom.2.25f; 4.1f; Gal.3.6ff; Eph.2.11f. This is an important and vital principle. The aspect of fulfilment does seem evident in Col.2.11-13 and could presuppose the repeal of circumcision in favour of baptism. It may well be implicit in these other passages quoted by Cullmann but the significance would need to be more precisely defined and indicated. If it is fulfilment, then this would substantiate the replacement thesis.

Cullmann thus finds it difficult to understand Barth who, while accepting baptism as the fulfilment of circumcision, yet denies infant baptism on the grounds that circumcision is pre-messianic, but baptism spiritual and messianic. Cullmann suggests that for Barth to accept an inner relationship between circumcision and baptism and yet to reject it in practice is inconsistent. Circumcision while in one sense pre-messianic, yet connotes a spiritual significance in OT and NT and the covenant place of children continues within the NT.

(c) Proselyte baptism where children were baptized as well as adults is introduced as corroborative evidence but this is extra-biblical.

Thus these are some of the grounds for maintaining a relationship of equivalence between baptism and circumcision especially in Col.2.11-13 but in other NT evidence. The contention also that baptism replaced circumcision as a covenant sign does seem to be implicit in Col.2.11-13 and other NT texts. In respect of this last matter, Paul's general attitude and the way in which baptism is a fulfilment of the significance of circumcision appear to be most relevant.

Notes

1. Oscar Cullmann, Baptism in the New Testament, London 1958, p57; J. Jeremias, Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries, London 1960, p40.
2. G.R. Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament, London 1962, p159

Robert P Carroll: Childs and Canon

Some academics will have had the experience of spending a good deal of time in seminars or lectures struggling with the translation and interpretation of a particularly difficult verse in, say, Jeremiah or Job only to have a theologically minded (divinity) student respond 'How would you preach that verse?'. Such an experience can be a salutary shock to the hermeneutic system and illustrates the divergence between what the academic imagines is involved (and practises) in the interpretation of texts and what certain students would expect to get from such a course. That divergence between approach and interests is not untypical of universities where faculties of divinity belong to the university system rather than are theological seminaries independent of the state academic system. Although part of the secular university system such faculties also function as theological colleges for the training of ministers for various churches. Often they may enjoy a strange relationship within such systems because the rest of the university may regard them as seminaries for the indoctrination of the Christian faith, whereas the churches may regard them as secular institutions apparently intent on destroying the faith of their students! The matter becomes even more complicated where the individual academic is both a member of the university and an ordained minister of one of the Christian churches. Such double membership can create problems of determining whether there are any differences in teaching Bible or religion to ordinary students and to theological students, as well as problems of what distinctions there may be between university and seminary teaching. Some of these issues have begun to surface in recent biblical scholarship, especially in discussions about the relationship between Bible and theology as well as in matters concerning the canon of scripture./1/

Apart from the permanent opposition to modern biblical scholarship of conservative and fundamentalistic factions there has been a good deal of dissatisfaction in theological circles with the historical critical approach to the Bible. The method has been subjected to much criticism recently and many scholars would prefer a more theologically satisfactory interpretation of the Bible if one could be found.^{/2/} As a methodology for the study of the Bible the historical critical approach grew out of the late Renaissance period and came to maturity in the time of the Enlightenment with its strong rationalist tendencies.^{/3/} It made the Bible accessible as a book to Jew, Christian and unbeliever by stressing the historical aspects of biblical literature and subjecting its contents to a critical analysis which excluded theological presuppositions and dogmas. In the nineteenth century the historical critical method began to gain ground in the theological schools and by the early twentieth century it had become the new orthodoxy in biblical scholarship. The more scholarship dissected the Bible critically the more alienated its theological features became for academic theology. It became possible to be an expert in biblical studies without being a devout Jew or Christian. The expansion of the universities in Great Britain in the 1960s has seen the development of departments of Religious Studies where the Bible has been studied as part of secular courses on religion. From theological norm to cultural artefact the Bible has steadily lost its special status in society and has become a book like any other book. As such it is studied in the universities. This diminution of its theological or normative status is part of the problem facing theology today. Among those who are convinced that the impasse between academic and theological treatments of the Bible can be resolved or surmounted scholars concerned with the canon of the Bible figure largely. This article then is an attempt to examine some of the elements involved in recent discussions about the canon of scripture, in particular the canon of the Old Testament.

From the historical critical viewpoint the theological leanings of the scholar should not make a significant difference to the interpretation of a text. Yet that is precisely what they do. As Martin Noth observes: "It is strange, and scarcely right, that it will commonly be asked today of a commentary on a book of the Old or the New Testament whether the author adheres to this or that theological or non-theological wing, but not whether or not he is a competent exegete."^{/4/} Much of the recent concern with canon has included an attempted justification of such theological handling of the biblical text and has also attacked the notion that there could be competent exegesis without theological commitment. In focusing on the canon as framework for biblical

interpretation the advocates of exegesis in the context of the canon are hoping to resolve the academic versus theologian issue in favour of the theologian.

The most active writer on the issue of canon as the means of the theological interpretation of the Bible is Brevard Childs. In a number of articles and books written during the 1960s and 1970s he has discussed at great length ways of resolving the problems created for theology by the historical critical approach to biblical studies./5/ The central concern of his writings may be summarized by a statement taken from the 1964 article (page 438):

" The exegete interprets the single text in the light of the whole Old Testament witness and,vice versa,he understands the whole of the Old Testament in the light of the single text. The circle of exegesis moves from the specific to the general and back again, and in the process one seeks for increased illumination. The exegetical circle is destroyed either if the analysis proceeds only in one direction and arrives at the general by summarizing the specific or,the reverse, if one moves only from the direction of the general and finds its illustration in the specific. "

This variation on the hermeneutic circle /6/ has been the guiding principle for Childs' later exegetical work,though to take it literally would be to produce commentaries beyond the capacity of printing houses to publish them.

In his Biblical Theology in Crisis Childs prefaced his own view of how biblical exegesis should be done with an account of the emergence and disintegration of the Biblical Theology Movement in postwar America. In place of the failed theological aspirations of American biblical theology Childs put the canon as the context for doing biblical theology and saw the primary task to be "the disciplined theological reflection of the Bible in the context of the canon" (page 122). Part of his concern in that book was with recovering an exegetical tradition in which the Bible was read and expounded as devotional literature (pages 139-47). The final section of the book illustrated how Childs would proceed with the exegesis of specific texts in relation to their larger biblical context and their development in the New Testament. Although a lightweight book it does provide evidence for how Childs' thinking was developing and allows for comparisons with the later stages of his thought. It also indicated the sense of concern with the development of biblical studies that a number of theologians had at that time.

In his commentary on Exodus Childs produced his most detailed exposition of the principle of biblical interpretation within the context of the canon. As well as the usual critical, literary and philological considerations of the text he provided sections on the Old Testament context, the New Testament context, the history of exegesis and theological reflections. As a volume in the Old Testament Library series of commentaries its distinctive approach can easily be seen in comparison with other volumes in the series. This is particularly the case when it is compared with Martin Noth's commentary on Exodus which was translated from the German commentary of 1959./7/ According to Childs the sections on Old Testament and New Testament contexts and on theological reflection are the heart of the commentary (page xvi). So any critical focus on the commentary should concentrate on those sections. However a commentary of 638 pages hardly permits a comprehensive criticism in anything less than a substantial review. The commentary raises many interesting questions about the nature of commentary writing as well as some fundamental questions about biblical hermeneutic. Throughout it Childs provides a discussion of the nature and role of canon in relation to church and theology. Thus he writes: "...the theological concept of canon is a confession. It is a testimony of the Christian church as a community of faith that God has chosen the vehicle of sacred scripture through which to make himself known to the church and the world, both in the past, present, and future... To take the concept of the canon seriously is to assign to scripture a normative role and to refuse to submit the truth of its testimony to criteria of human reason," (page 300). This approach to exegesis takes the text out of the hands of the exegetes (unless they are also theologians) and puts it firmly in the hands of the theologians. More specifically it hands the text over to Christian theologians because Childs is concerned with the way scripture testifies to "a unique self-disclosure of God in Jesus Christ" (loc.cit.) whereas the interpreter (perhaps a Jew or of another persuasion) may have imagined himself (or herself) to have been examining a Jewish text, i.e. Exodus. So the theological framework of the exegete becomes a fundamental factor in the exegesis and shifts the text from its own historical framework to a later framework. Yet at the same time Childs is concerned to maintain the Jewish exegesis of the text as part of the history of exegesis and as part of the theological concerns of the text. Thus a series of tensions inevitably arises from this kind of biblical interpretation. Tensions which cannot be resolved by appealing to the text in question because extra-textual considerations predominate the discussion. However Childs does allow the Old Testament text to critically correct later views embodied in the New Testament (eg, page 384).

In his latest book Childs has turned to the formal task of producing an introduction to the Old Testament. This genre has tended to be an atomistic approach to each book of the Hebrew Bible with the emphases on literary, historical and critical problems. Childs has attempted something different by treating each individual book in the Old Testament in relation to its canonical context. In effect that means taking the final form of each book as its significant form and developing a dialectical understanding of each book in relation to the whole canon. Less emphasis is put on how each book came to be in its present form and more stress is laid on the final form each book now has. The formal aspects of his Introduction are a bibliographical preface, a brief account of each book's historical critical problems, a discussion of its canonical shape and theological-hermeneutical implications and a very brief bibliography indicating the history of its exegesis. Those brought up on the critical introductions of Robert Pfeiffer or Otto Eissfeldt will find the Childs volume rather different in its approach and emphases. It will certainly appeal to the theologically inclined reader of the Bible and in particular to those who find the more conventional introduction an atomizing and arid product.

A volume of 645 pages is too substantial to provide an adequate review of it in the course of this article but a number of points may be made about it that are germane to this discussion.^{/8/} However much one may disagree with some of the details of the treatment the overall impact of the book is impressive. It is a pellucid and confident handling of many difficult aspects of Old Testament studies and is a very fine presentation of one man's view of how some of those problematic areas of the Bible should be treated in order to yield coherent and theological insights. It is also a fine contribution to the difficult problem of the relation between scripture and theology. Childs' insistence that on occasion the issue under discussion is a theological rather than an exegetical matter lends depth to his canonical context approach to interpretation. It will certainly help to construct one side of the argument in the growing dissatisfaction that many have with the conventional orthodoxy in biblical studies of the historical critical method.

As a preface to his treatment of the individual books of the Old Testament Childs provides a lengthy discussion of some of the issues involved in canonical interpretation and the matter of the canon itself (pages 41-106). Here he sets out his conviction that the problem to be overcome is the long established tension between historical criticism and the canon. A proper view of the canon is the key to overcoming this tension because the nature

of the literature must be correctly related to the community which treasured it as scripture (page 41). For Childs there is a fundamental dialectic at the heart of the canonical process: "It is constitutive of Israel's history that the literature formed the identity of the religious community which in turn shaped the literature" (loc.cit.). In place of the historical critical concern with the political, social and economic factors determining the biblical text Childs would put a proper treatment of the canonical process. He is very much against the modern tendency to stress the historical at the expense of the theological. This tendency usually manifests itself as a concern with separating primary and secondary strands of the text and distinguishing between the text and its afterlife. For him the multiple strands of a text are to be taken together because it is their final combined form which is canonical and therefore theologically significant. Thus he dissents from the technique used in Walther Zimmerli's magisterial commentary on Ezekiel /9/ of separating the Grundtext from the Nachinterpretation and observes: "This bias towards the historical often blocks an understanding of the final canonical form which has consciously introduced theological elements into the text in order to blur the common historical perspective." (page 370). So the text is to be understood synchronically rather than diachronically. The growth of what may be called canon consciousness (Seeligmann's Kanonbewusstsein) can be detected when the words of a prophet (eg, Is. 8:16f.) given on a specific occasion to a particular group came to have an authority apart from their original use. Of this Childs writes: "The heart of the canonical process lay in transmitting and ordering the authoritative tradition in a form which was compatible to function as scripture for a generation which had not participated in the original events of revelation. The ordering of the tradition for this new function involved a profoundly hermeneutical activity, the effects of which are now built into the structure of the canonical text. For this reason an adequate interpretation of the biblical text, both in terms of history and theology, depends on taking the canonical shape with great seriousness." (page 60).

As well as the dialectical relationship between biblical texts and the community which produced them Childs also sees a similar dialectical factor within the canonical process whereby the individual books in the Old Testament have to be interpreted in relation to one another. His practice in the Introduction is very much a modified application of his exegetical circle notion already quoted from his Interpretation article (see above page 3). An example of how the canonical shaping process works for Childs may be seen in his treatment of the book of Job. After a lengthy

discussion of the canonical shape of the book of Job (pages 533-544) he concludes: "The book of Job serves an important canonical function in respect to the larger canon. Above all, it supplies a critical corrective to the reading of the other wisdom books, especially Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Conversely, its proper interpretation depends on seeing Job in the perspective, not only of wisdom traditions, but also of Israel's liturgy and historical traditions. The Hebrew canon functions to preserve the integrity of its authoritative traditions by a restrictive outer boundary, yet it also encourages a creative exchange among its multiple parts." (page 544). The incompleteness of the dialectical analysis can be seen here in that the book of Job does not furnish a perspective for viewing the liturgical or historical traditions nor do Proverbs or Qoheleth provide a critical corrective to Job. In other words, Childs does not carry out a thorough-going dialectical critique of Job but uses it to reinforce a number of positions he takes on the primacy of Tora and the historical narratives in the Bible.

The primacy of Tora and the historical narratives for Childs is clearly to be seen in the statement of his reason for insisting on the final form of scripture as the proper study of the canonical approach. "The shape of the biblical text reflects a history of encounter between God and Israel. The canon serves to describe this peculiar relationship and to define the scope of this history by establishing a beginning and end to the process. It assigns a special quality to this particular segment of human history which became normative for all successive generations of this community of faith. The significance of the final form of the biblical text is that it alone bears witness to the full history of revelation. Within the Old Testament neither the process of the formation of the literature nor the history of its canonization is assigned an independent integrity. This dimension has often been lost or purposely blurred and is therefore dependent on scholarly reconstruction. The fixing of a canon of scripture implies that the witness to Israel's experience with God lies not in recovering such historical processes, but is testified to in the effect on the biblical text itself. Scripture bears witness to God's activity in history on Israel's behalf, but history per se is not a medium of revelation which is commensurate with a canon. It is only in the final form of the biblical text in which the normative history has reached an end that the full effect of this revelatory history can be perceived." (pages 75-6)./10/ This primacy of the normative history is not a dialectical notion at all but an overarching principle which easily distorts other principles and vitiates any possibility of a dialectical understanding of scripture. The wisdom traditions

do not know an encounter between God and Israel so in order to use them dialectically in the context of the canon their negative view of such an encounter must be allowed to modify or call in question the views of Tora and the sacred history. Otherwise the incorporation of the wisdom traditions into the canon distorts them and subsumes them under the control of canonic Tora. This distortion may have been intended by the canonical process but it is certainly not a dialectical process. The problem here is that Childs wants to make the encounter between God and Israel (an echo of Heilsgeschichte?) the central theme of the Old Testament but also wants to use the canonical approach as a dialectical tool. He cannot have both because the dialectical approach severely curtails the other. For example, Tora and the historical narratives are quite clear about the encounter between God and Israel; Second Isaiah is convinced that in his time Yahweh is going to do a new thing, is going to engineer a new exodus from Babylon. But Qohemoth is equally convinced that man is incapable of understanding the work of God and the other wisdom traditions have no place for the historical and national encounter between God and Israel. How are we to relate these two diametrically opposed positions to one another? Their dialectical resolution is far from apparent. Indeed they may be straightforward contradictions! To support Childs at this point entails the surrendering of the dialectical principle and that seems to be what Childs actually does in practice. His position is close to that of the 'canon within the canon' position which he rejects in Luther and others (page 44)./11/ There is an interesting account yet to be constructed of how the various books in the Old Testament relate dialectically to one another but such an account can hardly have a normative status for any religious community.

Throughout his Introduction Childs acknowledges the diversity of views to be found in the canon of the Old Testament and even can write of the "canonical tolerance of diversity" allowing "the material to function freely on several levels" (with reference to the diverse material in Numbers, page 200). He also recognises that the canonical shaping of material can be a subtle thing and so "requires careful exegesis and strenuous reflection" (with reference to the book of Exodus, page 177). The implication he draws from this is "the subsequent religious use of the material by the community could tolerate a certain level of literary friction within its scripture." (page 171). Thus the variety of diversities in the Bible uncovered by the historical critical approach will also have a part to play in the canonical approach to the interpretation of scripture. Where Childs would differ from the conventional historical critical approach is in his attempt to produce a holistic interpretation of the text which

uses as its guiding principles whatever can be discerned of the editors' or canonizers' intentions as presented by the text. He is convinced that their intentions can be determined by the text and notes that the present form of Job "shows signs of intentional shaping for the purpose of instructing the reader in the true role of wisdom" (page 543). It must be said however that it is far from clear that the substitution of the editor's (or the canonizers') intention in presenting an individual book of the Bible in its current form for the writer's intention or the author's original intention resolves any of the really difficult hermeneutical issues in biblical interpretation./12/ It is more likely to be a case of explaining the obscure by the still more obscure ('obscurum per obscurius').

The overall performance of controlled comment on every book of the Old Testament in the Introduction is impressive and the deep concern with rescuing the Bible for Christian theology is very evident. Yet in spite of the theological handling of the text Childs only occasionally broaches some of the most important issues in the theological approach to the Bible. On two separate occasions (pages 513,556) he notes,with reference to Psalms and Proverbs respectively,how the words of men have become the word of God but he does not focus on this phenomenon nor does he try to develop it any further. Yet such a transformation of the words of men into the word of God for the later communities is one of the most important features of the canonical process. It is central to the notion of canon and underwrites the normative status of canon for the community. It also requires a good deal of explanation and exposition in any major modern work on the normative status of canon. It is a very strange phenomenon how what started out as the farewell sermon of a great man to his people or the prayers of anguished worshippers reacting to a serious crisis in the life of the community or the sayings of the wise or the love songs of bawdy youths or the letters of Paul with the passage of time should have become the veritable word of God binding on the later community for all time. Traditional doctrines of inspiration and revelation have avoided facing up to the essentially human features of the biblical text and have often voided the text of any connection with real historical communities. Whether a new and more adequate doctrine of inspiration is required /13/ or a more painstaking account of the stages whereby the essentially human was transformed by theological reflection into the divine needs to be undertaken is for the theologians to determine. Childs maintains that "the community did not create scripture from its own experience" (page 663) but that "its response was to the authority of the divine Word which became incorporated into the message itself,

testifying to the continuing divine initiative within the tradition". However theologically correct that assessment may be it completely ignores the role of the community's experience in producing scripture. It also uses categories at home in the prophetic tradition but foreign to the wisdom tradition. It is therefore a partial statement and yields an unbalanced view of the whole Old Testament. Hokma is made subservient to Tora as was the canonizers' intention but as their intention was a distorting one the distortion is continued in the theological handling of the Bible. Canon as distortion is not an element often considered by writers on the canon but if a true picture of the canonic process is to be obtained it is an element which needs to be taken into account. The problem of the human element remains as an unassimilated factor in the production of the Bible and if its integrity is not to be denied then some account must be given of the fact that many of the biblical statements began life as simple observations and experiences of people rather than as religious dogmas. This may be to advocate a phenomenology of tradition approach to the Bible (an approach regarded by Childs as historically and theologically indefensible page 669) but the canonical context stance appears to be grossly defective here.

As the title indicates Childs' concern is with the Old Testament as scripture and that title declares a Christian approach to the Hebrew Bible. Apart from a couple of brief comments (pages 186-8 and 338) recognising the complexity of the issue involved in the problem of the later appropriation of the Old Testament by the Christian church Childs does not engage with this crucially important matter. There is some desultory discussion of some of the theological factors involved in Jewish and Christian views of the canon in the final section on 'The Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Bible' (pages 659-71) but the grounds for the legitimate appropriation and subsequent hermeneutical treatments of the Hebrew Bible are never examined. Space may not have permitted such an important discussion but its absence suggests further defects in the canonical context approach to biblical interpretation. If the text as it stands in conjunction with its canonizers' intentions is the proper subject of study how are we to deal with the radical transformations produced by the incorporation of the Hebrew Bible into the Christian Bible? The way the New Testament handles the Hebrew Bible may be a fairly legitimate extrapolation of certain elements already at work in the prophetic traditions but it can hardly be consonant with the intentions of the canonizers. If the contents of the canonical text were normative and therefore binding on the community what grounds were there for the early Christian communities to change

radically the binding laws of the canon? Whatever grounds may be found for the changes in Christian theology they constitute extra-canonical justification and that tends to rob Childs' advocacy of canonical context interpretation of a good deal of its force. Childs notes the problem when dealing with the book of Leviticus that there is no warrant for treating its rulings as temporary or subject to change yet both Judaism and Christianity have reinterpreted the levitical legislation. He admits that these changes did not rest on the canonical shape of Leviticus but "both communities appealed to a larger canonical interpretation by which to justify a unique appropriation of the sacred tradition" (page 188). The issue remains a theological problem rather than a canonical one though Childs would relate it to the question of canon. It certainly looks as though neither the Jewish nor the Christian communities felt bound by the canon to such an extent that canon alone shaped their belief and practice. So why should modern scholarship be so bound by canonical considerations?

The focus of this discussion has concentrated on Childs' most recent volume because it is the most comprehensive application of his principle of canonical context interpretation and also because it raises the most important questions about his theory and method. The analysis has been brief and selective because of the sheer amount of material available. The commentary and the introduction amount to about 1300 pages of text and include a good deal of detailed exegesis as well as a wide ranging command of bibliographical sources. By any standards Childs' contribution to biblical studies in the 1970s is a formidable one and it is difficult to think of another scholar, outside the German group, whose contribution is comparable. However much one may disagree with his position or dispute details of his work there can be no denying the excellence of his Introduction or the stimulation of his arguments. The presentation of his views will generate much discussion and should contribute greatly to the formulation of more satisfactory hermeneutical principles in biblical studies. The inclusion of critical assessments in the above analysis of his work is not intended to detract from the excellence of that work but to help focus on some of the issues germane to biblical hermeneutic. The books are too large to be restated by way of analysis so summary treatment has to include a selection of those aspects most open to discussion and a concentration on the notion of canon.

The work of Childs on canon needs to be placed in the context of the study of the canon being done by other scholars at the present time. For there is a movement in contemporary biblical

studies which has begun to focus on the canon as an important object of study. This movement (if it may be called such) is sometimes described by the phrase 'canonical criticism' /14/, though Childs himself is unhappy with the term (Introduction,82). Apart from Childs the other most significant figure in the focus on canon is James Sanders./15/ Sanders takes a different approach to canon in that he stresses the existential factors rather than the theological ones. The essential point of his book Torah and Canon is that "to speak of canon is first to speak of Torah" (page x) and that Torah is story. As it now stands the Torah (Genesis - Deuteronomy) is a narrative of the nation's life rather than a code of laws. Behind this canon lie questions of identity, authority, stability and adaptability. Canon is concerned with answering the community's question: "How shall we live?" (Ez.33:10)./16/ The canonization of scripture provided the community with its stable identity and the continual reinterpretation of scripture within the community permitted adaptive changes to be made in response to changing situations. The stress Sanders puts on canon as story may be seen in his most recent publication, a collection of sermons devoted to reapplying biblical passages to contemporary situations entitled God Has A Story Too. This emphasis on story is in keeping with other recent trends in biblical studies which have focused on the notion of story as a category for biblical analysis./17/ Although existential in emphasis Sanders' work is not without a strong theological aspect and he makes much play of the notion that God is radically and ultimately free. The importance he attaches to this notion is such that at one point in Torah and Canon he writes: "God's freedom from and sovereignty over any creed or doctrine; indeed, over any effort whatever of syntaxing in any manner what God's word to this or that generation might be" (page 115). This is a strange sentiment to find in a work on canon! But it is characteristic of a number of biblical theologians (eg, Walther Zimmerli, Hans Walter Wolff, James Sanders) that they should absolutize the motif of God's sovereign freedom and yet insist on treating the Bible as the word of God in such a way as to empty that freedom of substance. However the defects of theological argument should not be permitted to obscure the approach to canon taken by Sanders. The extent to which Sanders and Childs are in agreement or disagreement with one another on the subject of canon must remain open to debate, though Childs has expressed his disagreement with him on a number of important points (Introduction,56-9). What is commendable in Sanders is the stress on the community aspect of canon, the reinterpretative factors at work in the canonization process and the importance of hermeneutic. It remains to be seen how Sanders will develop his approach to give it the hermeneutic sophistication it needs.

Among the many recent studies on canon space permits only one other important work to be considered and that is Joseph Blenkinsopp's Prophecy and Canon./18/ The strength of this book is its presentation of the tensions between Tora and prophecy in such a way as to bring out the dialectical relationship between the first two parts of the biblical canon. In many ways this study provides a much more dialectical account of the matter than Childs does. For Blenkinsopp "canonicity happens within the history and interpretation of the tradition and...out of conflicting claims to mediate it." (page 14). The first major stage of the canonization process is Deuteronomy and that book (including the movement that gave rise to it) had a profound effect on prophecy by attempting to control the prophets. Thus he writes:"Deuteronomy produced a situation in which prophecy could not continue to exist without undergoing profound transformations, and the Deuteronomic history put its seal on this achievement...by "canonizing" the prophets as belonging to a past dispensation." (page 39). So although the entire canon can be said to be prophetic it is only prophetic in the sense of radically transformed prophecy (pages 81-2). The Tora-canon was a resolution of the conflicting authority claims made by the different groups of prophets. Throughout his book Blenkinsopp makes it clear that "the idea of a canon as generally understood is incompatible with the phenomenon of prophecy. Indeed, the emergence of a first canon with the book of Deuteronomy contributed greatly to the eclipse of prophecy." (page 147)./19/ But a compromise was effected between Tora and prophecy by placing the prophetic canon alongside Tora as a balance between law and prophecy, institution and charisma. "It is the fate of prophecy to be always necessary and never sufficient." (page 116).

This treatment of canon as being "intelligible only in the context of conflicting claims to control the redemptive media and, in particular, to mediate and interpret authoritatively the common tradition" (page 96) is, in spite of its brevity (152 pages of text and 35 pages of discursive notes), probably the best treatment of certain aspects of the canonic process to date. It lacks the grand scale, magisterial treatment of Childs but it focuses more adequately on a number of points skated over by Childs. In his account the "infinite interpretability"/20/ of a fixed tradition may be maintained by a due awareness of the creative tension constituted by the poles of law and prophecy and the need to maintain an equilibrium between the charismatic impulse which tends towards division and sectarianism and the account of the founding events which tends towards bureaucratic paralysis (pages 94-5). To quote from his conclusion:"The canon, then, does not lend itself to a definitive solution of the problem

of religious authority. The juxtaposition in it of law and prophecy suggests rather an unresolved tension, an unstable equilibrium, between rational order and the unpredictable and disruptive, between the claims of the past and those of the present and future. When emphasis is placed too much on the former the outcome is likely to be the conferring of absolute validity on present structures, bureaucratic paralysis and a drift to cultural assimilation. When rational order is neglected in favor of the charismatic, the tendency will be towards disunity, disequilibrium and ultimately sectarianism. Prophecy is necessary if only to show up the precarious nature of all fixed orders and the claims to legitimacy which sustain them, but prophecy alone cannot build a lasting community. The canon does not contain its own self-justification but rather directs our attention to the tradition which it mediates. For to say the least which has to be said, without the tradition there is no shared memory and therefore no community. Our study of the canon has led to the conclusion that no one interpretation of the tradition can be accorded final and definitive status. The presence of prophecy as an essential part of the canon means that it will always be possible and necessary to remold the tradition as a source of life-giving power." (pages 151-2). This treatment of canon holds more promise for the analysis of the problematic rise of Christianity out of Judaism in that it constructs an account of Jewish origins which takes seriously the polemical and dialectical elements involved in the construction of a universe of meaning./21/ "A canon represents an attempt to construct and maintain one world of meaning by a dominant religious and intellectual elite. It can only do so by embodying a prophetic claim to legitimation, but it cannot prevent the original prophetic impetus, given the appropriate circumstances, from showing up the impermanence of that world and the structures of meaning on which it is based." (page 150).

This brief survey of some recent studies of canon and in particular the work of Brevard Childs would be incomplete without a consideration of some of the criticisms that can be made of Childs' work. James Smart has recently attacked Childs' notion that there was a discernible movement in American biblical studies during the 1940s-1960s period that could be called the Biblical Theology Movement./22/ He also rejects the analysis of theology in Childs' Biblical Theology in Crisis in favour of a much more comprehensive notion of theology which includes the work of the dialectical theologians Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann. Much of the argument here is over semantic points and substituting theology for biblical theology does not help the discussion, especially when Smart himself wants to keep some such distinction (cf. pages 18-22). Whether there was a distinctive

movement which could be called Biblical Theology (associated with the work of Ernest Wright and others) or only a stance centring on biblical theology as recital which gave the work of certain biblical scholars a family resemblance to one another is a moot point now./23/ In his comments on canonical exegesis (pages 148-52) Smart welcomes Childs' approach as a breaking free from a fragmentizing exegesis which fixes the meaning of a text by determining the intention of the original author. For him the Christian exegete must refuse to limit his exegesis to original meanings and "boldly search out the ultimate Christian meaning of his text" (pages 151-2). He is, however, critical of the tendency in Childs to set a divine approval upon the final editing of each book because, for example, this entails a divine validation of such clumsy errors as the insertion of Cyrus' name in Second Isaiah. He is also critical of the general hostility shown by Childs towards the earlier period of historical criticism. "A canonical exegesis that tries to bypass the problems and the tasks of historical criticism would turn out to be one more form of reversion to the past rather than the way into a better future for the Bible in the church." (page 152). It is not always clear in Smart's book whether he is arguing that the present problems in biblical interpretation are caused by the failure of the historical critical method to take seriously the theological dimension of the Bible or have been caused by those twentieth century movements which did take seriously that aspect of the Bible. However he and Childs are agreed that the way to resolve the problem is by theological means. Smart is quite right to see part of the problem in the existence of so many diverse viewpoints and the number of disagreeing experts (page 69) but there is no way to resolve this problem of multitudinous opinions in the interpretation of the Bible. That is the essential problem for the theological handling of the Bible and whatever method is used to interpret the text diversity of opinion is inevitable. Canonical exegesis or theological focus will not resolve that problem.

Both Smart and Childs are also agreed that exegesis should not be limited to the original meaning of the text but should extend to include the history of exegesis and the making relevant of the text for the needs of contemporary religious communities. If however the diversity and multiplicity of interpretations of the biblical text are part of the problem how much more so will any inclusion of the history of interpretation add to the problematics of exegesis. Horace's observation 'the doctors are divided' (*doctores scinduntur*) should be the motto of any group devoted to hermeneutic activity and it applies even more to the history of interpretation. It is therefore difficult to see how

including the history of exegesis as part of the meaning of texts will clarify the task of interpretation. The history of exegesis is an important element in the history of ideas and also an interesting aspect of looking at the ways in which texts have been interpreted over a period of time. But to make it part of the meaning of texts is to confuse meaning with something else. In medieval hermeneutics that aspect of exegesis which drew from texts significance for daily life and practice was known as the application (applicatio) of scripture. Meaning and application were not the same thing, though they were not entirely separated. The important distinction between the two things may be made by using the terms meaning and significance /24/ or, to use a more philosophical approach, by taking up Gottlob Frege's distinction between Sinn and Bedeutung. /25/ Although there are serious difficulties involved in the philosophical aspects of hermeneutic some such distinctions have to be made in order to preserve the historicalness and specificity of language. If linguistic units and sentences can mean anything then language loses its force and its context ceases to have any function. The meaning of specific linguistic uses is determined by context and the sense of the language as used in its time. /26/ To destroy its context and evacuate its historicalness of significance in order to justify incorporating all subsequent developments and application is to advocate intellectual vandalism and to reduce language to being a formless bearer of any meaning that can be put upon it. It is also unnecessary because the history of its interpretation can be undertaken without confusing that history with original meaning. The theological concern with the history of exegesis as the meaning of texts is a confused and confusing enterprise. In order to protect itself from any meaning being derived from a specific text (a danger it has created for itself by adopting such a stance in the first place) it has to import a canonical control to limit the number of meanings available for any text. Different frameworks will make the same text mean different things (whatever canonical similarity may be operative). The only way to protect the meaning of the text is to insist on the integrity of its historical language. Original language and original meaning do not necessarily rule out ambiguity, obscurity, abstruseness and possible incomprehension. But to sidestep such difficulties by importing later (and therefore unhistorical) meanings is to abandon the scholar's task and to defeat the hermeneutic enterprise altogether.

Neither the application of texts nor the discernment of subtle or radical transformations of meaning going on within texts is ruled out by this insistence on seeking the original meaning of the text. Texts do have significances and applications which go

well beyond their original meanings. Canons, communities and traditions operate with such functions but these functions need to be kept separate from original meaning however much there may be an overlap between meaning and function. Such a distinction between meaning and function (significance) may be tacit or explicit for the hermeneutic activity but it has to be recognised as operative even among those who denounce the search for the original meaning. Few teachers of Bible can have avoided the inevitable encounter with a student or a caller at the door who wishes to impose an absurd meaning on a biblical text as the justification for their weird belief system. In rejecting such an absurd interpretation there is an implicit belief that some meanings applied to texts are wrong. What controls that belief? Is it merely an egotistical belief in one's own rightness? Is it due to relativizing frameworks of belief? If original meaning is ruled out of court what justifies the selection or rejection of different meanings? What justifies the rejection of the view that the reference to "adversary" and "lion" in Amos 3:11,12 is not, in the light of 1 Peter 5:8, a reference to the devil? The steps by which that interpretation is shown to be invalid are part of a theory (implicit or otherwise) of validation in interpretation. Although the example used is a fairly trivial one it is one that has bearing on the notion of canonical context exegesis because it is based not only on an actual example but on the fact that the larger canon of the Christian Bible contains a much more developed reference field for the terms used in Amos. If the scholars and theologians who reject original meaning and demand history of exegesis meanings indiscriminately accepted any and every meaning offered in the history of interpretation then the demand for validity in interpretation would be pointless. However because they also recognise legitimate and illegitimate meanings it is necessary to ask for an articulation of the procedures for validating such choices.

The history of exegesis approach also involves the rather impractical task of collating all the views taken of a text. Given the substantial amount of exegetical activity that has been focused on the Bible in Jewish, Christian, academic and literary circles over nearly two thousand years that is an impossible task to undertake. Clearly such a demand has either a very selective view in mind or is essentially elitist in its view of the matter. That is, interpretation is to be limited to Jewish or Christian exegetes or certain exegetes are universally agreed to be significant (eg, Augustine, Qimhi, Calvin, Barth etc.). If a history of exegesis approach is to be taken seriously it must be a proper history of interpretation. It must take into account the radical traditions of Samuel Fisher and Thomas Paine as well

as the minor pamphleteers of obscure denominations; the sermons of the famous (eg, John Donne) and the wayside pulpits of late Victorian religiosity. The task is endless and quickly conforms to the law of diminishing returns. It should not, however, be permitted to stop there but must extend its inquiry to take into account the less religious manifestations of biblical exegesis. Novels provide a further example of the history of interpretation and a biblical hermeneutic programme which failed to take cognizance of Thomas Mann's Joseph and His Brothers, Stefan Heym's The King David Report or Dan Jacobson's The Rape of Tamar (to mention but three) would be defective. If the Protestant obsession with the written word could be overcome there would be a strong case for extending the research to include the iconic world of art and painting with its great devotion to depicting biblical scenes, to the world of music which sought to express the response of the believing community to the biblical stories, and also to the world of the cinema where many fine directors and writers have produced their versions of the Bible. Where would it end? Yet I am not trying to reduce the history of exegesis quest to an absurd level. It is the enormity of the task that prompts me to indicate what might be involved in it and to ask if this really is the way to resolve the problem of the original meaning of texts. Childs does acknowledge the difficulty of one man trying to control equally the wide range of fields involved in such a task (but even he does not touch on the categories I have outlined) but feels "Still the effort has to be made to sketch the true parameters of the discipline of biblical interpretation, even if there are gaps and deficiencies in one man's attempt." (Exodus, x). Quite, but will it, if actually carried out, really resolve the confused state of modern biblical interpretation and will it really clarify the difficulties of understanding scripture in the twentieth century? In doubting that it will no denigration of Childs is intended.

Although Childs keeps the diversity of opinions within the Bible constantly in view the tendency of canonical exegesis is to reduce the variety of biblical traditions to a much narrower theological (Tora orientated) tradition. Thus Qoheleth is rather reduced by being corrected by Job. The Song of Solomon becomes almost a paean to bourgeois marriage by being brought "within the institution of marriage" (Introduction, 575)./27/ Canon may incorporate a wide diversity of material but it tends to reduce that variety by subjecting it to a small number of theological controls. The history of the interpretation of the Song of Solomon is ample evidence of that point. As the demand for canonical context exegesis has come from theologians concerned to maintain specific theological traditions it is hardly surprising

that there should be a narrowing down of the rich variety of multiple meanings and traditions in the Bible. Such a diminution of hermeneutical richness may be acceptable within a theological tradition in order to safeguard ecclesiastical structures but it would have no standing in academic or intellectual circles. At this point canonical exegesis returns the Bible to the keeping of the religious communities where it has normative status and the division between religious and noetic traditions is once more confirmed. This move will not solve the problems created for theology by the historical critical movement but it might allow them to be ignored. The steady negation of biblical religion within communities holding the Bible as authoritative will continue because the agent of negation is the Bible itself. It is for that reason that the disintegration of the position of the Bible in the community has been most rapid in reformed circles where the principle sola scriptura has been dominant. From Luther to Hegel the real thrust of the Bible, namely the desacralization (Entzauberung) of the world, has been active in Christian civilization./28/ The historical critical method has only been one of the ways that disenchantment worked its way through culture. So the return to the canon may well be a fruitless return to the past - whether it proves to be a cul-de-sac remains to be seen.

One fundamental difficulty with Childs' position is the problem of the Christian canon. Not the two testaments canon but the Greek canon of the Old Testament. Childs takes the Hebrew canon as the object of study and the Masoretic Text as the version of that canon which constitutes "the vehicle both for recovering and for understanding the canonical text of the Old Testament" (Introduction,97). The reasons set out for choosing the Jewish canon rather than the favoured Septuagint of Christian usage (pages 97-9) are less than convincing. Although Childs would side with Jerome against Augustine on this point /29/, for many centuries the Christian church took the Septuagint as the canon until at the reformation the reformers opted for the Hebrew canon. The differences between these two Old Testament canons are often substantial and in many cases it is the Greek canon which carries the more explicit Christian element (eg, order of books) and is already part of that hermeneutic transformation which elsewhere Childs wishes to incorporate into his motif of canonical exegesis. The differences between the Hebrew and Greek versions of Jeremiah are significant and bear on the argument here. The Greek edition and order may well represent an earlier stage of Jeremiah but this possibility does not justify Childs treating the Masoretic edition as superior because later for that would equally justify his using the rest of the Greek canon

because or wherever it is later than the Hebrew. Childs sees no problem here because the same theology is implied in the Greek tradition as the Hebrew (Introduction,352-3). However the issue of the two editions of Jeremiah is more problematic than that and canonical exegesis needs to focus on it as one way of testing and refining the method and its advocacy.

Space does not permit a thoroughgoing critique of Childs' work which is both stimulating and substantial. More could be made of his dismissal of misunderstandings incorporated into the Bible because such a factor would militate against his understanding of canonical interpretation. Yet might not such a misunderstanding account for the presence of the book of Jonah in the prophetic traditions? Is it not possibly also the case that marginalia (eg, the Aramaic verse in Jer.10:11) were not incorporated into the text as a deliberate theological policy of the canonizers but came into the manuscripts by accident or as private notes and the copies with such marginalia were passed on and became canonic? Throughout his commentary and his introduction Childs attacks positions which import categories into the Bible for describing the biblical traditions. Yet can this really be avoided? Is not the writing of commentaries and introductions the application of external categories to biblical material? Childs acknowledges that the use of the term canon to describe the scriptures is of Christian rather than Jewish origin (Introduction,50) so it is essentially a category external to the Old Testament! So many categories used in theological circles are not biblical that to desist from using such categories would render the doing of the theology impossible. However enough has been said by way of criticising Childs on canon to indicate some of the areas where the most discussion will focus.

According to some philosophers of science an important aspect of any scientific research must be the generating of critical research programmes./30/ Perhaps biblical studies might follow suit and see promising work as that which generates critical (ie, discriminating) research programmes for others to work on by way of elucidating the work already done, testing it and refuting or confirming it. Along such lines Childs' notion of canonical exegesis may well produce promising research work programmes. The notion and structure of canon still require sophisticated investigation as does its history and the process that gave rise to it. Notions such as 'nascent canon' /31/ and legal rulings as proto-canons or canonical type decisions also need to be researched. The community aspects of the canon such as the needs which gave rise to a canon or the control over the community imposed by canonical structures are important features

that require investigation. Childs may not like the sociological approach to canon (cf. Introduction, 78) but the factors giving rise to texts are fundamentally important for the hermeneutic task./32/ The relationship between the canons of the Old and the New Testaments and the relation between the Hebrew and the Christian Bibles also need to be examined. One of Childs' main concerns from his Interpretation article period up to the latest work has been the Jewish side of canon and exegesis. The problem of the integrity of Judaism and its survival as a community in its own right with its own scriptures for Christianity has yet to be fully discussed. Canonical studies provide an opportunity for making good that defect of Christian history. There are also many other important issues raised by canonical studies: eg, the relation of the Bible to theology, the justification of retaining a normative canon of scripture for religious communities today, the whole hermeneutic process of understanding the Bible as having any normative status in modern society as well as the continuing task of developing proper hermeneutical principles for the study of the Bible. A further important issue touched on by canonical studies is the relation between the theological and the academic study of the Bible: the different approaches of studying the Bible as the word of God and as a cultural entity in western society. Many of these possible research programmes are not simply noetic activities but have direct bearing on the way community structures are and should be constructed. If in the course of this article I have tended to side with the noetic, the academic and the hermeneutic approach to the Bible rather than with the theological, the confessional and the ecclesiastical approach it is because in the long run I believe hermeneutic (the study of human artefacts) to be more important than theological commitment because what we have in common is our humanity rather than our ideological commitment. I suspect the canonical study approach is a more exclusivizing technique where commitment counts more than humanity and the defence of certain theological positions is more important than the diversity of human beliefs.

This polarization of hermeneutic and canon may not be a factor necessary to the debate but reading between the lines (as well as what is explicit in Smart) I get the impression that canonical study is an apologetic movement from within theological circles intent on reclaiming the Bible as their own and as such that means hermeneutic is in opposition./33/ Canonical study is not a way out of the wood only a focusing on another part of the wood. The focus is on different issues and aspects of biblical studies but, apart from its possible greater degree of theological reflection, it is hard to resist placing it alongside such recent moves as rhetorical criticism, structuralism and the Bible as

literature as ways of understanding biblical traditions in a post-critical and post-Christian era. Childs would reject this association of canonical study with these other categories of approach (Introduction,82) but I doubt if it will significantly add to the resolution of the problems created by the historical critical approach./34/ It will assist those who wish for a more theological approach to the Bible but whether that is what the quest of understanding is about is a matter for serious debate. Richard McKeon, the Aristotelian philosopher, was regarded by the neo-Thomists at the University of Chicago in the 1930s as the Anti-Christ because by making better sense of the texts he cooled off prospective converts./35/ That is what the hermeneutic enterprise is about - the proper understanding of texts rather than the function of texts in the maintenance of ideological systems./36/ Canon is about function, hermeneutic is about meaning. That is why conflict is inevitable between the canonic process elevated to a theological apologetic and the more fundamental task of understanding the meaning of texts. Childs' contribution to this conflict is to have set out some of the lines of battle where engagement must take place between theology and hermeneutic. As a mustering of the troops it is quite an impressive performance but how it will contribute to the outcome of the battle remains to be seen.

NOTES

- 1 On this see D.H.Kelsey, The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology (Philadelphia 1975); J.Barr, Does Biblical Study Still Belong to Theology? (Oxford 1978).
- 2 The plethora of writings on this subject makes the point self evident but see in particular W.Wink, The Bible in Human Transformation: Toward a New Paradigm for Biblical Study (Philadelphia 1973); G.Maier, The End of the Historical-Critical Method (St. Louis 1977); and the voluminous writings of Jacques Ellul.
- 3 See Cambridge History of the Bible 3, 238-338; P.Hazard, The European Mind 1680-1715 (London 1973 ed.); E.Krentz, The Historical-Critical Method (London 1975), 6-32. A classic example of the rationalist approach to the Bible is Baruch Spinoza's Tractatus Theologico-Politicus (Hamburg 1670; London 1868 ed.).
- 4 Developing Lines of Theological Thought in Germany (Virginia 1963), 5.
- 5 In particular see 'Interpretation in Faith. The Theological Responsibility of an Old Testament Commentary', Interpretation 18 (1964), 432-49; Biblical Theology in Crisis (Philadelphia 1970);

'The Old Testament as Scripture of the Church', Concordia Theological Monthly 43 (1972), 709-22; Exodus: A Commentary (London 1974); 'Sensus Literalis: An Ancient and Modern Problem', Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie (FS Zimmerli: Göttingen 1976); Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture (London 1979).

- 6 On the hermeneutic circle ('the whole must be understood in terms of its individual parts, individual parts in terms of the whole') see F. Schleiermacher, Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts ed. H. Kimmeler (Missoula 1977), 121, 59; 20.1, 113; W. Dilthey, 'Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik', Gesammelte Schriften 5, 317-37 (an English translation of this essay is available in W. Dilthey: Selected Writings ed. H. P. Rickman (Cambridge 1976), 247-63); H.-G. Gadamer, Truth and Method (London 1975), 235-45. The formulation by Childs is not equivalent to the hermeneutic circle but analogous to it because the Bible is not the canon of one man's work. It is more like the history of English literature from Beowulf to Dickens.
- 7 Das zweite Buch Mose, Exodus (Das Alte Testament Deutsch 5: Göttingen 1959); Exodus: A Commentary (OTL: London 1962). Childs' commentary has now replaced Noth's in the OTL series.
- 8 Cf. my review of it in Scottish Journal of Theology 33 (1980), 285-91; also C. S. Rodd, 'Talking Points from Books', The Expository Times 91 (1980), 129-31.
- 9 Ezechiel (BKAT XIII: Neukirchen-Vluyn 1962ff); see now Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel Chapters 1-24 (Hermeneia: Philadelphia 1979).
- 10 Cf. the similar remarks in his Exodus, 299-302 which constitute a fair statement of his general position.
- 11 For this principle in recent American biblical theology see G. E. Wright, 'The Canon as Theological Problem', The Old Testament and Theology (New York 1969), 166-85.
- 12 On author's intention see E. D. Hirsch, Validity in Interpretation (New Haven & London 1967), 1-23.
- 13 On this point see the writings of Peter Stuhlmacher, esp. his Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Toward a Hermeneutics of Consent (London 1979).
- 14 See J. A. Sanders, Torah and Canon (Philadelphia 1972), ix-xx; cf. Carroll, 'Canonical criticism: a recent trend in biblical studies?' The Expository Times (forthcoming).
- 15 Apart from his Torah and Canon see his many articles: eg, 'Adaptable for Life: the Nature and Function of the Canon',

- Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God ed. F.M. Cross, W.E. Lemke & P.D. Miller (FS Wright: Garden City 1976), 531-60; 'Biblical Criticism and the Bible as Canon', Union Seminary Quarterly Review 32 (1977), 157-65; 'Text and Canon: Concepts and Method', JBL 98 (1979), 5-29; God Has A Story Too: Sermons in Context (Philadelphia 1979).
- 16 Torah and Canon, 53, 106. For the sense of the phrase 'êk nihyeh cf. Is. 20:6. Sanders' treatment of it in relation to canon is more homiletic than in line with its original sense.
- 17 Cf. B. Wicker, The Story-Shaped World (London 1975), 1-113; J. Barr, 'Story and History in Biblical Theology', Journal of Religion 16 (1976), 1-17; J. Navone, Towards a Theology of Story (Slough 1977). Long before this recent trend of associating religion with story Leo Baeck, in a devastating attack on Christianity as a romantic religion, characterised the reduction of religion to story as one of differentiation between classical religion which knows living history and romantic religion which knows only a finished story; see his essay 'Romantic Religion' in Judaism and Christianity: Essays by Leo Baeck ed. W. Kaufmann (New York 1970), 218f. Proponents of the story approach to religion (rather than myth or dogma as the approach) should read (again) Baeck's arguments.
- 18 Prophecy and Canon: A Contribution to the Study of Jewish Origins (University of Notre Dame Center for the Study of Judaism and Christianity in Antiquity 3: Notre Dame & London 1977). The list of recent writings on canon is too lengthy for a footnote but see esp. S.Z. Leiman, The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence (Hamden, Connecticut 1976); P.R. Ackroyd, 'Original Text and Canonical Text', Union Seminary Quarterly Review 32, 166-73; and the articles on canon in the Wright Festschrift (Note 15 above); Canon and Authority: Essays in Old Testament Religion and Theology ed. G.W. Coats & B.O. Long (Philadelphia 1977); Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament ed. D.A. Knight (London 1977).
- 19 The point is also made on pages 94, 99. For a similar view of the controlling of prophecy by Deuteronomy and the priesthood see E. Rivkin, The Shaping of Jewish History: A Radical New Interpretation (New York 1971), 3-41.
- 20 Blenkinsopp (page 94) takes the phrase from Gershom Scholem's observation "God's word is infinitely interpretable; indeed, it is the object of interpretation par excellence." in his essay 'Revelation and Tradition as Religious Categories in Judaism' in The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality (London 1971), 295.

- 21 Blenkinsopp makes good use of the writings of Max Weber, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, esp. the sociology of knowledge approach to social structures as set out in P.L. Berger & T. Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge (London 1967). Childs rejects such approaches (cf. Introduction, 78) and also has no place in his account of canon for the strongly polemical forces which created the traditions. A better approach here is that of Morton Smith, Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament (New York & London 1971). The point is well made by Antonius Gunneweg (Understanding the Old Testament (London 1978), 10) "The Hebrew canon is itself a piece of polemic against all Hellenistic and apocalyptic innovations, and at the same time a polemic against the 'sect' of the church with its proclamation of Christ." Childs regards such factors as belonging to the realm of hypothesis (Introduction, 66).
- 22 The Past, Present, and Future of Biblical Theology (Philadelphia 1979), 9-30. Smart's own contributions to biblical theology are many, see esp. The Interpretation of Scripture (London 1961); and the much more minor works The Old Testament in Dialogue with Modern Man (London 1965); The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church (London 1970). For how his theological approach works as commentary on the text see History and Theology in Second Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 35, 40-66 (London 1965). There is a useful survey of biblical theology in his book The Interpretation of Scripture, 232-307.
- 23 Those who were students of Semitics or biblical studies in the late 1950s &/or the early 1960s will probably remember that in that period there was a discernible 'movement' known as biblical theology that was associated with the work of Ernest Wright and John Bright. It may only have been an impression but it was an impression of something distinctive. Whatever it was about survives in some sense (and still with American overtones) in movements which stress the importance of the archaeological approach to the Bible.
- 24 For this distinction see Hirsch, Validity in Interpretation, 8.
- 25 Frege's article 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung' was first published in Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik 100 (1892), 25-50. For an English translation see 'On Sense and Reference' in Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege ed. P. Geach & M. Black (Oxford 1970), 56-78. This use of Frege's distinction is only the first stage in the development of a hermeneutic of meaning in language. For a treatment of it see A. Nygren, Meaning and Method: Prolegomena to

- a Scientific Philosophy of Religion and a Scientific Theology (London 1972), 229-37.
- 26 These aspects are central features of hermeneutic theory as developed by Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Gadamer. On the theory see R.E. Palmer, Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer (Evanston 1969); also see E.V. McKnight, Meaning in Texts: The Historical Shaping of a Narrative Hermeneutics (Philadelphia 1978), 7-64.
- 27 Cf. the much more open, ie not restricted to marriage, approach to human sexuality in his treatment of the Song of Solomon in Biblical Theology in Crisis, 190-8 esp. 193.
- 28 On this cf. P.L. Berger, The Social Reality of Religion (London 1969), 111-30; on Hegel's part in this see K.L. With, From Hegel to Nietzsche: the revolution in nineteenth-century thought (London 1965), esp. 327-33.
- 29 Introduction, 666; cf. Biblical Theology in Crisis, 108. On some of the elements involved in the Augustine-Jerome debate see W. Schwarz, Principles and Problems of Biblical Translation: Some Reformation Controversies and their Background (Cambridge 1955), 17-44. On the Greek OT see A.C. Sundberg, The Old Testament of the Early Church (Harvard Theological Studies 20: Cambridge, Mass. & London 1964).
- 30 See the Kuhn-Popper debate in philosophy of science and in particular the writings of Imre Lakatos: eg, his 'Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes' in Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge ed. I. Lakatos & A. Musgrave (Cambridge 1970), 91-196.
- 31 Cf. R.E. Clements, Old Testament Theology: A Fresh Approach (London 1978), 161, 164f.; Leiman, op. cit., 16-26; also Childs, Introduction, 55f.
- 32 Cf. Gadamer, Truth and Method, esp. 333-41; also M. Smith, op. cit.
- 33 The object of hermeneutic is the understanding of what Dilthey calls Geisteswissenschaften 'human sciences'. Cf. W. Herberg, 'Hermeneutics: The Mode of Interpretation' in Faith Enacted as History: Essays in Biblical Theology ed. B.W. Anderson (Philadelphia 1976), 102-11.
- 34 Cf. Barr's view in IDB Supplementary Volume, 110f.
- 35 Cf. P. Goodman, Little Prayers and Finite Experience (London 1973), 105.
- 36 ie, hermeneutic as understanding texts as best we can (Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons') rather than as better than the author did (Schleiermacher) or rethinking his thoughts (Dilthey).

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One of the difficulties in dealing with the extensive, profound and

and exhilarating theology of Karl Barth is that it requires much time, interest and perseverance to master and understand it. It is therefore not unnatural that attempts should be made to provide summaries, introductions or keys to understanding the voluminous pages of the Church Dogmatics, not to speak of Barth's many other writings. This has already been attempted with considerable success by Otto Weber in "Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics" which unfortunately has only been translated into English as far as volume III/4 of the Dogmatics. Again, one of the best introductions is that of Herbert Hartwell, The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction (1964).

The latest to attempt a task similar to that of Weber is Geoffrey W. Bromiley to whom we are greatly indebted for his fine translation of the major part of the Church Dogmatics. Bromiley has already given summaries of various volumes of the Dogmatics in the Scottish Journal of Theology as they appeared in his translation. He has worked over the material again and presented in this book a succinct and clear précis of the whole of the Church Dogmatics - a considerable achievement. Hence the title of the book is slightly misleading for it is not what it says - "An Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth" - but a précis of his greatest work. As such it is a clear, competent guide to the subject.

He tries to justify yet another précis by indicating that many misunderstand and misrepresent Barth. Moreover Barth's own summaries such as "Dogmatics in Outline" and "Credo" themselves presuppose knowledge of his theology and these are so compressed that they can scarcely be capable of being understood by beginners. This volume is not intended to displace all such, much less to be an adequate substitute for reading the Church Dogmatics themselves. It is meant to be read in conjunction with them. Herein lies its main advantage as does that of Weber: for a reader of the Church Dogmatics who wishes to see the wood from the trees, such a summary is a useful help. For the beginner or anyone who wishes to have an insight into Barth's whole programme, intention and approach, its value is more doubtful. Indeed the work is so condensed that one feels it is impossible to peck (as Bromiley often does) one hundred pages of the Church Dogmatics into three.

For all its limitations the book has obvious merits. It is clearly and systematically presented and is on the whole a faithful reproduction. However on page 224 Bromiley puts three questions from Barth as positive answers whereas they are in fact answered negatively by Barth. At certain points it counters current misconceptions of Barth. For example, "in what he has to say about the authority and freedom of Scripture as God's work, Barth leaves little room for complaint" (p.44). Or again "those who look to Barth for the odd idea that evangelism is merely informing people that they are saved, are misinformed" (p.203).

One or two critical points have also to be made in evaluating this book. Bromiley is uneven in his use of elucidatory and critical comments. Some chapters give a critical comment at the end while others are simple summaries. A short, introductory, interpretative comment at the beginning and an assessment at the end of each chapter would have helped and would not have added greatly to the length of the book. Otto Weber wisely provides this kind of commentary interwoven with his summaries. Bromiley is critical of two points in particular in Barth's emphasis. The first is the use of the idea of "The Nihil" to describe all that

opposes God and the second is Barth's thrust towards a supposed universalism. But it is not "The Nihil" - a negative quality with great destructive power which is a real threat to man - a suitable word for something which at the same time is not God's positive will or creation? And is not the thrust of the all-inclusive action of God's reconciliation in Christ true to the NT emphasis on the superiority of God's grace to all that opposes it? While therefore Barth may not speak explicitly of eternal damnation, he nevertheless does not at any time espouse universalism as traditionally understood.

Again and finally, Bromiley adopts what is essentially a neutral attitude towards Barth, eschewing both commendation and condemnation. This in itself may be commendable and Bromiley does point to the many strengths of Barth in a concluding section. He fails however to see that even though Barth's biblical exegesis may occasionally have been dubious, he (Barth) had an undoubted flair and feel for the centrality of the meaning of Holy Scripture and a superb ability to set it out in profound and illuminating dogmatic form. One could scarcely expect a précis to provide us with insights into the subtlety, profundity, richness and beauty of Barth's great work, but what Bromiley has attempted and achieved is within its limits clear and helpful to all students of Barth.

Evangelical Theology is a repeat in American dress of Barth's last lectures in Basel on the subject of the nature of theology and the theologian's task. It was first published in 1963 and has four sections. First of all the theologian's task is to interpret the biblical witness; secondly it is to do so in the context of personal commitment in faith, care and wonder; thirdly it is to recognize the pitfalls and temptations that accompany the task in doubt and solitude; and fourthly it will be carried out in the devoted application of study, prayer, service and love.

Theology is evangelical in treating of and interpreting the God of the Gospel and not indulging in a mixture of philosophy and theology. This is a fine little volume but again is scarcely an introduction since it can only be properly understood by those in some way already familiar with Barth. Here lies one of our recurrent problems.

There is an interesting preface by Barth on his experiences in America where he repeated several of these lectures. He has his usual strictures on labelling him or following his theology slavishly. Theology is after all written in Basel and not in heaven. For America and for all of us he recommends a "Theology of Freedom that looks ahead and strives forward" (p. xii). It is not a man we follow but in freedom we seek to understand, interpret and bear witness to God in his revelation and reconciliation in Jesus Christ - as this is attested in Scripture, believed in the church and proclaimed and witnessed to the world.

David Cairns, A System of Christian Doctrine

St. Andrew Press 1979. pp xx + 218 £3.75

It has long been a desideratum to have a short statement of Christian doctrine to put in the hands of students at the beginning of their theological training. When therefore one finds a book with almost exactly this title, one approaches it with eager anticipation. In some respects

but in some only this book meets the need. It has ten chapters on most of the doctrines of the faith including God, man, Jesus Christ (Person and Work), the Holy Spirit, the Church and the Sacraments, and Eschatology. Furthermore it does seek to be true to the chief emphasis of orthodox doctrine, setting this in a modern context and carrying out a dialogue with contemporary man. When one adds to this the fact that the book is the distilled wisdom of the elder, revered, late David Cairns of Aberdeen, then one's expectations of a permanent short statement of the faith persist.

The book also contains a glowing tribute by Dr. A.C. Craig as foreword and a preface by his son, David, giving the reasons for the publication of the book, written before 1946 but only published last year (1979). Here in fact lies the first weakness of the book - quite simply it is dated. It is hardly acceptable to say that Barth and Bultmann have come and gone and David Cairns remains, having anticipated and answered the modern heterodoxies of Maurice Wiles etc. Did not Barth, Denney and Forayth do so - even better? It is moreover dated in the sense that what was written before 1946 could not have had the mature Barth in mind nor the writings of our contemporaries. Any valid system of Christian doctrine (1980 style) must have this information and knowledge. Nor has the editing by David Junior been done thoroughly. It is acknowledged (p.60) that Barth's later doctrine of man did not accept the view that the image of God was wholly lost, yet precisely this is erroneously attributed to Barth in the next two pages (61-62).

In the second place, while Cairns Senior in most cases did remain close to mainstream orthodoxy, his contributions vary greatly. It is extraordinary to find in the doctrine of God no mention of the Trinity and that in eschatology he holds dialogue only with C.H. Dodd and shows little appreciation of the fact that theology is eschatologically determined from its very centre and throughout. Again his son points out that "with regard to the 5th chapter on 'The Work of Christ'.....my father felt he had a special contribution to make" (p.xix). Yet this chapter fails to fulfil this expectation. It is a critique of traditional views of the atonement (and not always a fair one) and offering us in their place the formula that the Cross revealed the grace of God and the sin of man. True but does it not as God's act of reconciliation (as P.T. Forsyth continually points out) affect both sides - God and man? Here with Cairns wrath and judgment scarcely figure at all and one wonders if this view of the atonement goes much further than the moral influence - one which receives the least criticism of all in his treatment.

Finally the book is an attempt to state the main elements of the Christian revelation in an apologetic context. This is a difficult task nobly attempted here and in many cases showing the inadequacy of secular views, yet it is not altogether successful. Is there not some truth in Barth's obiter dicta that the true and best apologetics is dogmatics, that is, a simple affirmation of the truth of the faith as one conceives it? There is a constant feeling in reading this book that the apologetic concern, the beginning with man has in many places conditioned the content of the statements. There is therefore an unacknowledged pre-understanding that partially at any rate conditions some of the statements of the faith. Other parts of the book it must be said in fairness do affirm clearly what needs to be said.

Dr. Hill begins his discussion with a definition of the Christian prophet: "a Christian prophet is a Christian who functions within a church, occasionally or regularly, as a divinely called and divinely inspired speaker who receives intelligible and authoritative revelations or messages which he is impelled to deliver publicly, in oral or written form, to Christian individuals and/or the Christian community" (pp.8f). He then looks at the background, dismissing that of Greek and Roman religion as relatively unimportant in comparison with the prophetic tradition of the OT. Since on the one hand he does not regard the prophets of the NT as successors to the prophets of the OT and since on the other most of the readers of the NT and many of its writers were influenced by Hellenism, this dismissal of Graeco-Roman influence may be over-hasty.

Turning to the NT itself he begins with Jesus Christ (John the Baptist was discussed under background). Certainly some of Jesus' contemporaries regarded him as a prophet but did he so regard himself? If he did not publicly affirm himself to be a prophet, many of his activities fall within the definition of prophecy. He possessed prophetic insight into the minds of others and prophetic insight in relation to his own death. He was conscious of "being, in a quite singular way, the recipient and mediator of the knowledge of God" (p.64). His prophetic position may be seen in his use of the word "Amen" and in the sayings which begin "I am come". If some of his activities are rightly categorized as prophetic, this however does not adequately describe him; his christology cannot be contained within the term prophecy.

For Jesus Dr. Hill turns to the writings of the NT. The Book of Revelation describes itself as a prophecy and it is better to accept this description than to describe it as an Apoclypse. However John its author is not an ordinary prophet but the leader of a prophetic group (p.88). Within Acts there are many prophetic figures, e.g., Peter, Stephen, Barnabas. Of these the most representative is Barnabas whose name probably means "son of prophecy". Paul regarded himself as a prophet, having received a prophetic call on the road to Damascus, but he does not normally describe himself as such since "apostle" is a more comprehensive term. Paul however tells us a great deal about Christian prophecy in his time. In 1 Cor. 14 he distinguishes it from glossolalia by stressing its edifying nature. Prophecy often came as a word of revelation (p.126); this allows us to distinguish it from teaching. Hill suggests "that the category of pastoral preaching may be a useful designation for the Christian prophet's speech" (p.126).

There is not much to be learnt from other parts of the NT though Hebrews might well be described as the work of a prophet. Hill then turns to the view of many scholars that the sayings of the NT prophets, received later from the risen Lord came to be read back into the life of the earthly Jesus; he argues correctly that there is no explicit evidence for their theory. He does allow that there are some Gospel sayings which cannot be attributed to the earthly Jesus; unfortunately he does not account adequately for their origin and to some extent this negates his attack on the possibility of their prophetic origin.

After the NT period prophecy quickly disappeared or, more correctly, since if it is pastoral preaching it did not disappear, the use of the term to describe an activity which was regarded as good amongst Christians disappeared. The repudiation of Montanism marked the end of the approval of prophecy by name within the church.

A final chapter deals with the nature of prophecy today. The term has come into use again within the charismatic movement to describe a particular gift of the Spirit. Hill is not too happy about this.

This is a very helpful book, particularly in light of the charismatic revival of prophecy. Pentecostalist who practise prophecy argue that they are continuing a NT ministry; it is precisely here that Dr. Hill would challenge them. I believe however that Dr. Hill has tended to eliminate too rapidly the predictive element from NT prophecy. The Greek world of the time was eager to know what the future held and it was believed possible to discover it by taking omens and listening to the ecstatic utterances of oracles. The revelations given by the Corinthian prophets may have involved prediction. Can the predictive element really be written out of Revelation? False prophets are mentioned in Mk 13, implying the connection of prophecy with apocalypticism and prediction. Paul himself may have exercised the predictive gift (1 Thess 3.4; 1 Cor. 15.51f). When Barnabas and Saul were set aside for their missionary work (Acts 13.1-3), was there not an element of prediction as to what they would do? The most explicit references in the NT to the activity of an actual prophet are the two references to Agabus (Acts 11.27f; 21.10f) - an activity one of prediction. In stressing the non-predictive element in NT prophecy, Hill has to work from implicit rather than explicit evidence. I suspect also that the modern pentecostalist prophet is nearer to some forms of NT prophecy than Hill allows. We now realise that "apostle" is used with varying meaning in the NT; Hill does allow sufficiently for the same possibility for 'prophet'. That however we find a certain practice or office in the NT does not itself provide a sufficient basis for arguing that it should appear in the church today.

Finally it only needs to be said that Dr. Hill has read everything of importance for his subject, carefully and judiciously weighed it, and courageously come to his own conclusions. His book is to be highly commended both to those who believe that they exercise a prophetic ministry and to those who find themselves in a position of pastoral responsibility for them.

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